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PLAYBOY

20

HALSEY

With Hopeless Fountain Kingdom, the queen of New Americana is more outspoken than ever. Here, she talks about donating $100,000 to Planned Parenthood and the virtues of the dad bod

INTERVIEW BY **REBECCA HAITHCOAT**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RAMONA ROSALES**

Q1: Hopeless Fountain Kingdom hit number one on the Billboard 200. You're the first woman to top that chart in 2017. How does it feel?

HALSEY: A lot of this accolade shit is super arbitrary: "Halsey is the first girl with blue hair from New Jersey to…." It's exciting but also enraging, because I know a lot of women who put out better albums than me who deserve massive accolades, and I'm the one who had to break the seal.

Q2: Badlands, your 2015 debut studio album, made you a pop star. In less than a year you went from playing 400-capacity clubs to selling out Madison Square Garden. Then, last year, the Chainsmokers' "Closer" blasted you to a whole new level. Has your ascent been as dizzying as it looks from here?

HALSEY: I got successful so quickly. I blinked, and a couple months later I was performing on national television. There was zero time to get adjusted. I was considered relevant and important enough to accept awards and perform, but some people were like, "Who the fuck is that?" It's weird: The further I slip into the mainstream, I also maintain this kind of cult personality. And it's weird to me that I've tried so hard to be transparent, and then after "Closer" it dawned on me that many people know only that about me.

Q3: Do you ever feel you're underestimated?

HALSEY: I feel like I have been, yeah. After "Closer"—which is an absolutely great pop record, and I mean no disrespect to the guys— it was really hard for me and my fans. People were like, "Oh, the 'backseat of your Rover' girl." My fans were like, "No, the girl I've loved for three years and sings about mental health and self-love." Also, I write every song. I have co-writing credits, but most of the time it's a co-write from a melodic perspective. Make no mistake: The poetry is mine. I executiveproduced this album and direct my videos, so to go from that to "Rover girl," no.

Q4: How is the new album different from Badlands?

HALSEY: I needed this album. I described Badlands as an angry female album. But I'm not angry anymore. I just feel catharsis. Calm. Hopeless Fountain Kingdom was about me trying to figure out who I am again. I'm smiling and happy. I stopped biting my nails. I have these long, beautiful nails I grew out because I'm not anxious anymore. Now I feel just…good. Until the next thing comes along that fucks me up so I can write the third album.

Q5: You've become known as a pop star with an unusually close connection to your fans. Does that generosity make it hard for you to maintain romantic relationships?

HALSEY: I learned a while ago to keep that part separate. I've dated people no one knows about. I've managed to keep them to myself, going through a breakup and not having it be on the fucking internet. I'm always in a position of dominance in my relationships, and a lot of people have had a hard time dealing with that. I think because I'm so dominant in my main life, in my intimate life I want to be in a position of submission. I want to be taken care of since I'm taking care of everybody else all the time. But I'm a fucking 22-year-old female CEO of a company; I can't do all that all day and then come home to some person and be like, "Okay, now treat me like I'm a delicate little flower."

Q6: How do newer fans respond to you?

HALSEY: I love watching people change their mentality. I love watching frat bros tweet me things like "You're the hottest woman. You're my celebrity crush." And I'm judging them back, like "You are not a dude I'd think would find me hot. By any means." Whatever it is about me—my music, the way I speak or whatever led you to be accepting and interested in me—that's really cool.

Q7: You seem to have a pretty laissez-faire attitude about your appearance. Does that extend to your body image?

HALSEY: I always had an 18-year-old's tight body. I could just eat whatever the fuck I wanted to and have abs, and my butt was always firm and round. Then recently I was changing and looked in the mirror and was like, "Oh my God—it's been three months since I've been on tour! My body is changing. I need to put in work now." I went down this psychological rabbit hole, and now I'm telling myself that I need to change how my body is changing naturally.

Q8: Would you ever get cosmetic surgery?

HALSEY: I try never to do anything permanent. And it's not because I have qualms about plastic surgery; it's because I have qualms about my own indecisiveness. I don't want to make surgical decisions and in 10 years be like, "Ah, small lips are very in fashion now." Can you believe

"I still have white boys asking me why my nipples are brown."

that around 10 years ago all the women's beauty magazines were writing articles about how to make your butt look smaller? Now it's "How to Make Your Butt Look As Big As You Fucking Can."

Q9: Do you think beauty ideals are becoming more inclusive?

HALSEY: I think we've finally reached the point where we're so oversaturated with sexuality and so much is considered "ideal" that we're in a position where we can change everything. I watch my own perspective changing. I was talking to a guy, flirting with him by a pool, and he took off his shirt. He wasn't a muscular dude, but he wasn't skinny, he was kind of chubby. I just remember being like, "He looks so happy and confident, and I love the way he looks." This isn't a self-applauding thing. Hopefully we are becoming a society that appreciates people as a whole package instead of little parts on a checklist.

Q10: You're only 22, but you've already used your platform to raise awareness about social issues. You went to the Women's March in Washington, D.C. and donated $100,000 to Planned Parenthood earlier this year. How was that received?

HALSEY: The negativity around Planned Parenthood was crazy: "That's not your money. Someone's using you as a front to donate it." g"Whenever celebrities say they're donating money, they never really are, it's a company." No. I charged it to my personal Amex card. And the second-biggest response was "Why Planned Parenthood? Why not the ACLU? Why not LGBT causes? Why not blah blah blah?" I've got to fight one battle at a time.

Q11: You've been vocal about your endometriosis, and Planned Parenthood was instrumental in treating that, right?

HALSEY: Yeah! In 2015, I had a miscarriage on tour, and the first place I went was Planned Parenthood. All the responses were like, "Well, if you have $100,000 to donate, why did you have to go to Planned Parenthood?" Other people have controlled this negative narrative that it's a low-income place, this place in the ghetto, this place for abortions, this place where drug users go, this place where "slutty" girls go—I say "slutty" in quotes because I'm rolling my eyes at it. But it's a doctor's of

fice I can afford some of the best health care in the fucking world and I still went there, because I trust it

Q12: How do you handle the negativity that's constantly hurled at you?

HALSEY: When a society is inclined to get negative, that frequency spreads across everyone Everyone's looking for a fight There is a fight to fight, but some people are picking the wrong one and fighting people who are on their side And everyone has become a detective

Q13: A detective? Is that related to "first" culture, where everybody races to be the first to post about a trend or controversy?

HALSEY: That's completely what it is Everyone's goal is to be the one to find out that someone's doing something wrong. A girl will post a photo of herself with braids and the first response will be "This is cultural appropriation What the fuck is wrong with you?" And the girl will say, "I'm half black " Then the person's like, "Oh, sorry You look pretty " We've become traumatized because so many people have actually committed cultural appropriation, but our instinct is too reflexive

Q14: How did you navigate growing up biracial?

HALSEY: I'm half black. My dad managed a car dealership, wore a suit to work, had a nice watch, was always clean-shaven, handsome, played golf on the weekends And people would come up to him like, "Yo, brotha! What's up!" And my dad would be like, "Hi "

Q15: How did that affect you?

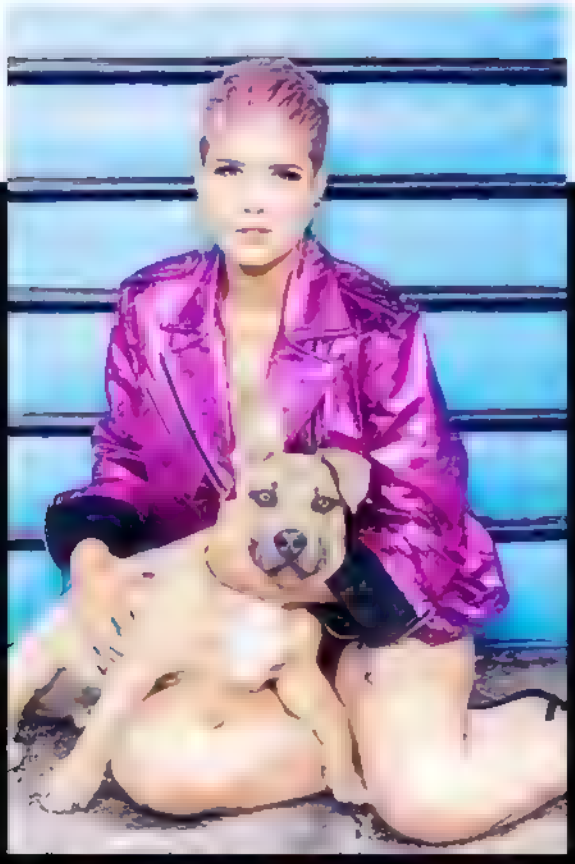
HALSEY: I'm white-passing I've accepted that about myself and have never tried to control anything about black culture that's not mine I'm proud to be in a biracial family, I'm proud of who I am, and I'm proud of my hair One of my big jokes a long time ago was "I look white, but I still have white boys in my life asking me why my nipples are brown." Every now and then I experience these racial blips I look like a white girl, but I don't feel like one I'm a black woman So it's been weird navigating that. When I was growing up I didn't know if I was supposed to love TLC or Britney

"You can't cry 15 times in a meet-and-greet, but I still do. I hope I never lose that."

Q16: How do people react when they do find out you're biracial?

HALSEY: White guilt is funny, but this is a really hard time for white allies People don't want to do too much but want to do enough, and in my bubble of Los Angeles I'm surrounded by a lot of good people with a lot of good intentions But as I learned in this past election, my bubble is just a small fraction of how this country operates That is ultimately my greatest frustration with the public perception of any sort of activism the mentality of "Well, it's not affecting me." Open your fucking eyes

Q17: Your hallmark in interviews is being really open. Is that just your nature, the same way you've refused to censor yourself when writing lyrics?



fans out financially when they were struggling. Do you feel a responsibility toward them?

HALSEY: It has made me empathetic, but it's hard. I sign into Twitter and at any given moment there are a hundred kids messaging me: "My mom died. I hurt myself. I have an eating disorder. I'm failing school. My best friend committed suicide." It's amazing when I can be there for them, but that's still energy I carry all day long. I love that it hasn't numbed me. You can't cry 15 times in a meet-and-greet, but I still do. I hope I never lose that, because having the capacity to care in that way keeps you a decent human being. That's all I fucking want: to be a decent human being.

HALSEY: Sometimes I forget I'm doing interviews and I just talk to people. I have a friend who has been in the industry a very long time, and he said to me the other day, "Remember, the press is not your therapist." Being an artist is so fucking lonely, though. People forget that when I'm on tour, sometimes interviews are the only human interaction I get all day.

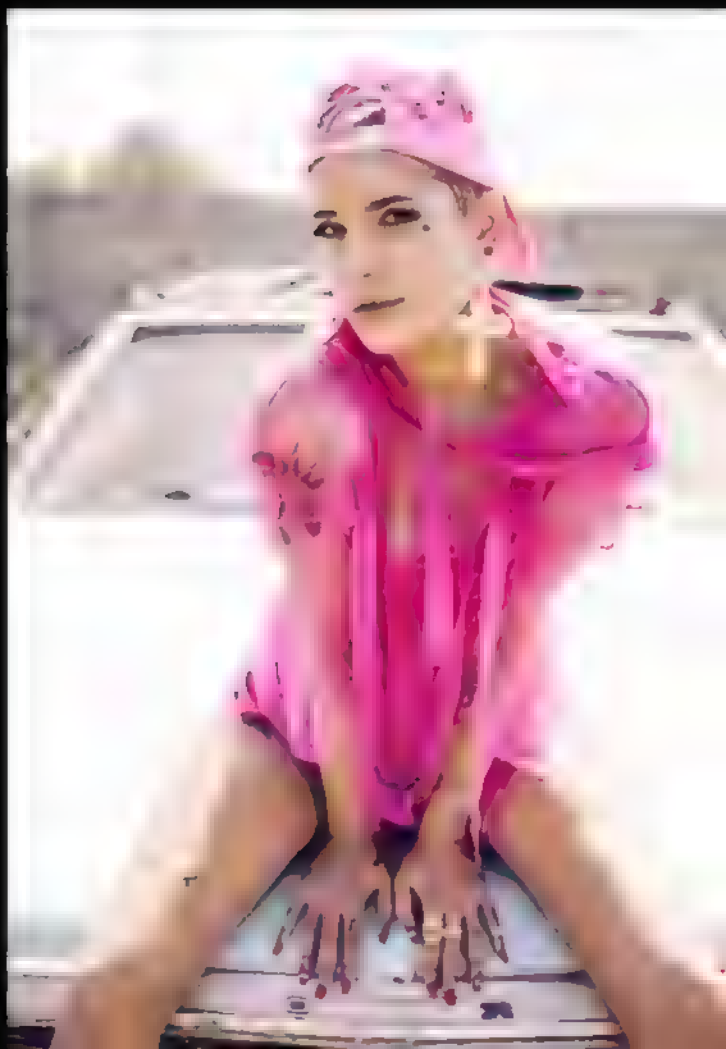
Q18: If it makes you feel better, oftentimes it's the only human interaction for the journalist too. Are there things you've regretted divulging?

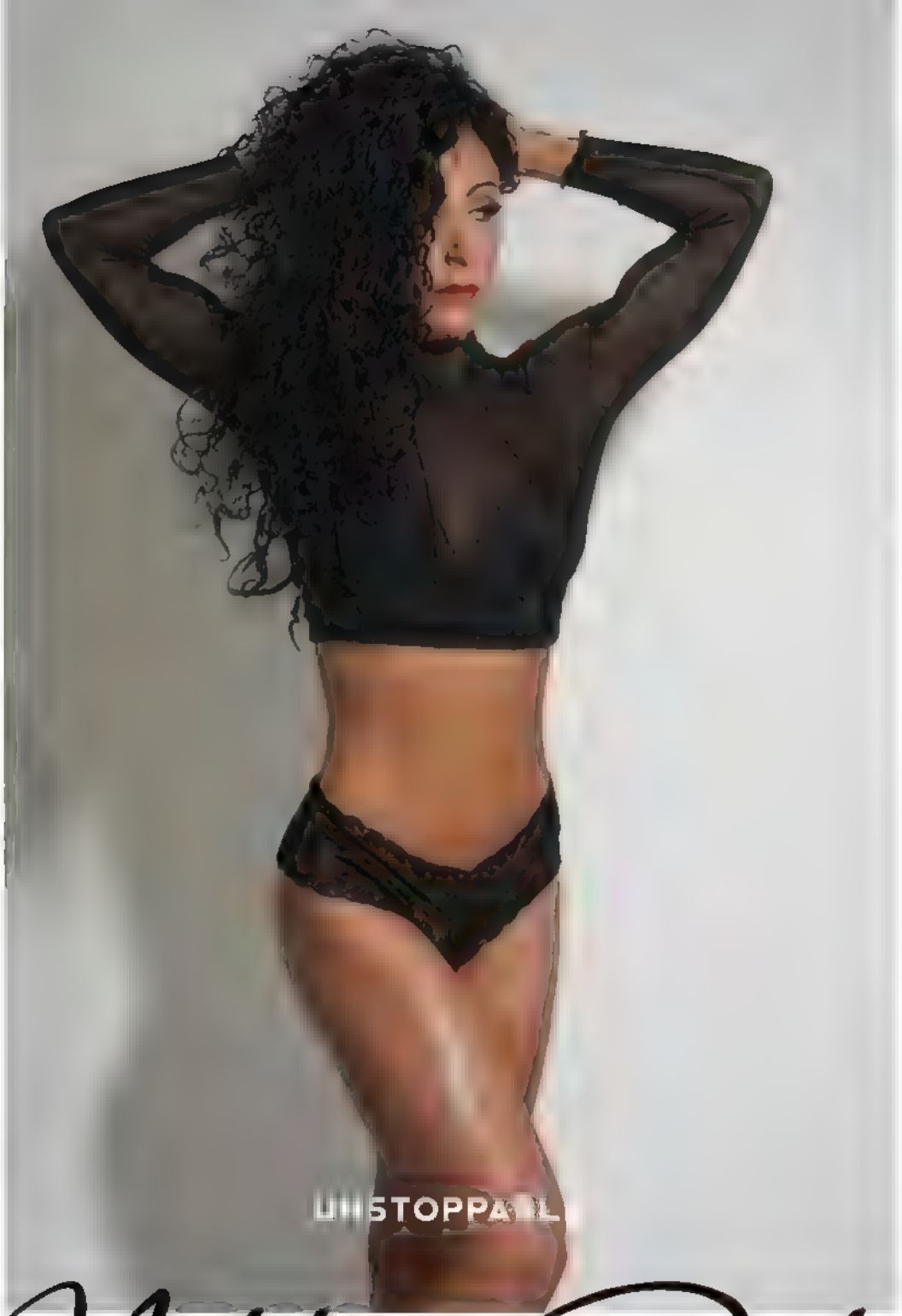
HALSEY: Sometimes I give pieces of myself to everyone that I wish I could take back. As soon as I have my first child, articles will say, "Back in 2016, Halsey came out about having a miscarriage, so we're very happy for her." I'll be enjoying the happiest moment of my entire life, because I want to be a mom more than anything—if you told me tomorrow that I had to quit music but could have a happy family, I'd be like, "Sorry, guys, I'm out"—and I know the press will ruin it.

Q19: What spurred you to reveal your miscarriage to the press?

HALSEY: Every time I read a miscarriage story, it's about a happily married woman who loses a baby, and that's fucking terrible and I empathize, but I never read "A 20-year-old girl who's scared and alone and single had a miscarriage." And guess what—that happens all around the world every day. I wanted to say something about it because when I was going through it, I was fucking alone. I didn't know any artists I could have called and said, "Hey, I know this happened to you. What should I do? Can I go back on tour? How long did it take for your hormones to realign?" I had no one to talk to.

Q20: You have open DMs on Twitter, and you've helped

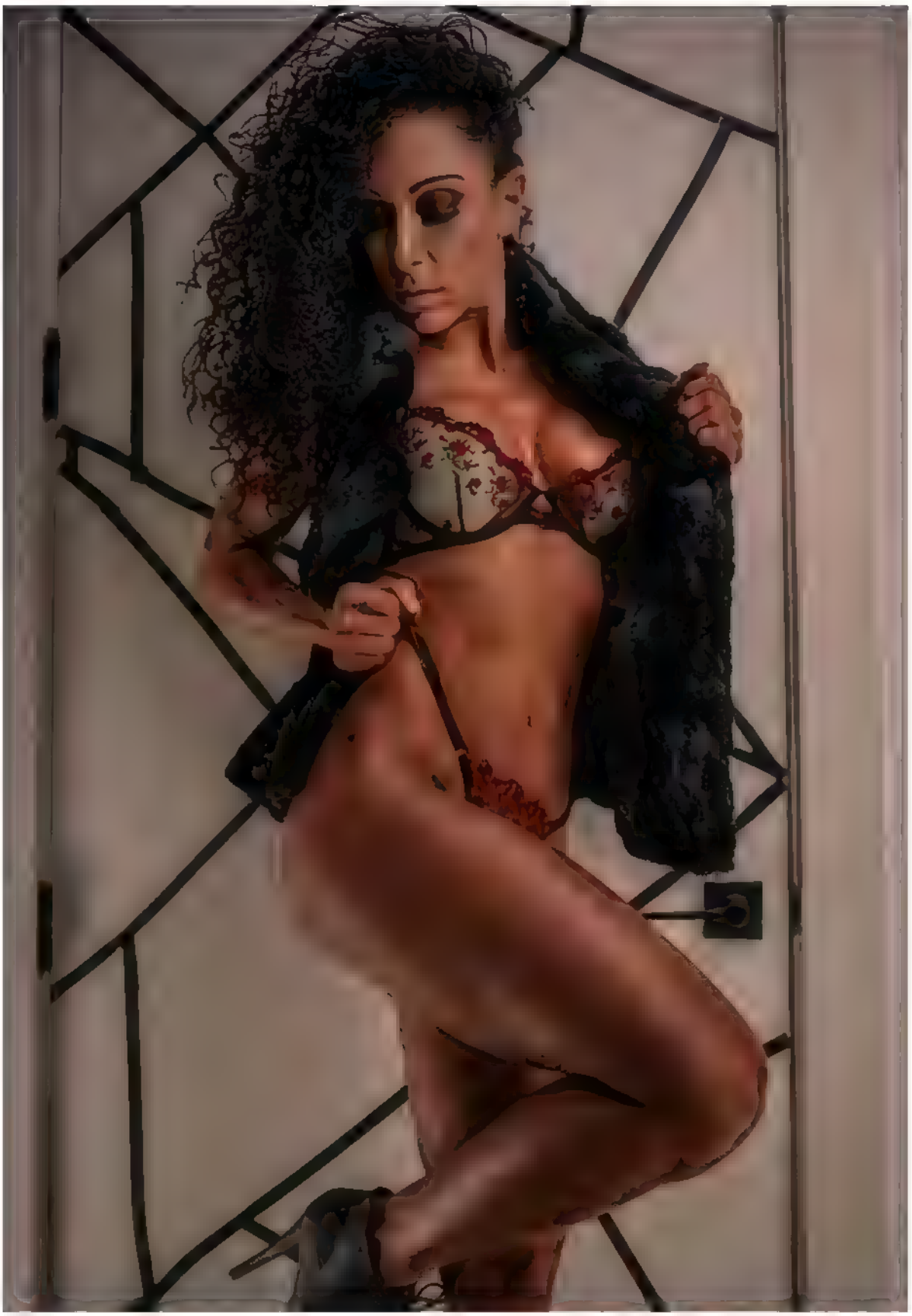




Nikki Politi

Model **@nikki.politi**

Photography by **James Diaz | @jamesdiaz_photography**
MUA **Nikki Jay | @nikkij_mua**



Congratulations on your Playboy feature! How do you feel? Super excited! I have oved Playboy ever since I was a teenager It is so iconic.

What is your best physical feature? Def n tely my eyes! I have been to d many times over the years that my eyes are very strong and bold.

What's one thing people would be surprised to learn about you? That I have a passion for dentistry! I have been in the dental f eld since I was a teenager and still ove making people sm le today

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? I would love to be happ y married w th a family

Outside of modeling, what are some of your passions or projects you are currently working on? I a so promote and judge bodybuild ng shows. Bodybuild ng has been a passion of mine for over 10 years. I got involved during my compet ng journey as a Bikin Athlete and qu ck y turned to the business side of things.

Who inspires you the most, either in modeling or in life in general? My mom nspires me the most. She grew up in a very strict Ita an household where she was taught that a wife/mother can't go to work and has to be home to take care of kids and cook and clean. She went against her families w shes and went to work! She is so strong and has preserved through so many of fe's challenges.

What message do you hope to send to women who see your feature? I hope women see my feature and understand that strong is sexy! You can ift weights and still be super feminine and sexy. Lifting weights does not make you manly In fact, it can help tone and shape your curves to feel more confident.

How do you define confidence and sensuality in your own terms? Confidence is be eving in yourself. Knowing I can wa k into a room and do not need approval from others to wear certa n clothes or speak my mind. I can stay true to myself and not worry about others l k ng or disl k ng me. Sensuality to me, means stimu ating the senses. Look ng deep into someone's eyes, affect onate touch, and shared exper ences

What has been the biggest lesson you have learned since entering the modeling industry? The b ggest lesson I have learned is the importance of se f-worth. Between modeling and bodybuilding, it's too easy to start think ng my value is in only how I look or how often I'm chosen. But I have learned that confidence, profess onalism, and being true to myself is way more important than fitting into a standard The most successful and fulf led people I have met know who they are outside of a "look"

Do you like taking vacations? Where is your favorite place you have been and where would you like to visit next? I love vacations! I would like to visit Italy next. Recently I have been loving Las Vegas. I love how there is so much nightlife There are always great places to eat and shows to watch. I love how the fun and happy v bes are constant, no matter what the t me of day.

Besides modeling, what keeps you busy? I spend a lot of my weekends, judging and putting on bodybuilding shows. I love being so involved in such a beautifu competit on. I a so love spending time with my dog, Ginger. She is my little fur baby.

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? If I were stranded on a deserted island, I'd br ng my oversized sunglasses Because they would help me block the sun and I would be rocking fierce island fash on.

What's next for you any goals, projects, or dreams you are excited about? I am excited about my shows approaching The NPC Pennsylvania Muscle, The IFBB NPC Muscle Town Championships, and The IFBB and NPC Night of Champions My business partner, Gary, and I are super excited to showcase the athletes and all their hard work

What advice would you give to aspiring models? NEVER GIVE UP. Noth ng in this life is really given to us. It takes many many applicat ons, failures, and trials to get where we need to be. But perseverance will always shine in the end.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words for our readers and where can they find you? My Instagram is @nikk politi Stay focused and always remember that your confidence and strength is your sexy, own it.

Playboy Interview

TA-NEHISI COATES

A candid conversation with the public intellectual, comic-book writer and all-around brilliant American on rap, racism, reparations and more

INTERVIEW BY **BOMANI JONES** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JORK WEISMANN**

Making the case that the United States government owes black people for what it has done to them is an unlikely way to become a household name, but that's what Ta-Nehisi Coates did two years ago. "The Case for Reparations" was the cover story of the June 2014 issue of The Atlantic, and the publication says the piece brought more unique visitors to its site in a single day than any other magazine story it had ever run. Coates's thorough defense of a revolutionary idea became a star turn.

Then came Between the World and Me, a 176-page essay that doubles as a letter to his now 15-year-old son. In it, Coates covers police brutality, spirituality and coming-of-age in ways that capture how much has and hasn't changed since his adolescence. Focusing on all the things that threaten black bodies and the fear produced by that condition, he soberly reports on the struggles inextricably linked to blackness, trading the traditional tale of freedom and redemption for one supported by history instead of hope. The book was instantly hailed as a masterpiece, yielding its author a National Book Award and a MacArthur Fellowship and ending up as a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Coates went from simply being critically acclaimed to being compared

to James Baldwin by no less an authority than Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison.

He's as shocked by all this as anyone else. A Kanye-esque college dropout sharing stages with some of the world's preeminent scholars just six years after losing three jobs in seven years? That would be enough to drive the average intellectual past the point of hubris. But not Coates, who seems unable to process his current success without keeping an intimate acquaintance with tougher times.

Ta-Nehisi Coates was born on September 30, 1975 in Baltimore and grew up on the west side of the city, the part of town made famous by HBO's The Wire. His first book, The Beautiful Struggle, tells the story of his upbringing, the product of a pan-African resistance to the toxicity of the 1980s—both the political rhetoric and the poison flooding the streets. After struggling through high school, Coates went to Howard University in Washington, D.C., where his father worked as a librarian. Although bright and well-read, the teacher's son wasn't a good student, and he left to pursue a career in journalism.

He bounced from job to job—fired from Philadelphia Weekly, "basically forced out" of The Village Voice, laid off from Time (nine years later he would appear on the Time 100 list)—before landing at The Atlantic in 2008, initially as a blogger. His posts were pointed, precise and parsimonious. The only side he consistently took was the one born of logic. He called out Barack Obama for his sweeping critiques of black America the same way he responded to similar sentiments from the right. He matter-of-factly confronted questions of race, rejecting optimistic narratives and basing his conclusions on centuries of irrefutable American history. That work helped build trust and a following that made "The Case for Reparations" possible, which led to Ta-Nehisi Coates becoming more prominent than he thinks he should be.

When we're wrong, it's craziness, but when they're wrong, it's... Harvard.

He's thirsty for challenges. That's why he agreed to write a series of Black Panther comics for Marvel and why he currently lives in Paris. His approach is self-assured but short on delusion, qualities reflected in his demeanor as well as his work.

ESPN's Bomani Jones met Coates at a café in Paris's third arrondissement, across the street from the apartment he shares with his wife and son. They talked over dinner and resumed the conversation the next morning at a Latin Quarter hotel. "He's uncommonly warm and gracious when he's comfortable, with a big laugh and frequent smile," Jones says. "Some of that faded when he talked about harder times, but discomfort never stopped him from saying what he felt. He's similar in person to how he comes across on the page: honest, measured and emotive—and as brilliant as most of us think he is, which is more than he thinks of himself."

PLAYBOY: When did you realize you had become somebody?

COATES: When I came to The Atlantic I'd been writing for 12 years. The Atlantic is seen as this arbiter of sophisticated ideas, well ensconced in the mainstream consensus, and then they bring in this dude. I wasn't making the case for reparations back then, but I was saying that sort of shit. I could see the reaction, and it built a little bit, and then when "The Case for Reparations" came out—holy shit. But even then it was like, "This is one story, and I'll go back to my life." I thought Between the World and Me would hit people who read shit. When we did BookExpo America, the book-trade joint, there was a line of people to get the galleys. I was like, "What the fuck?" And I knew it was some shit when somebody said to me on Twitter, "Oh, you've got to be a celebrity to get this book?" [laughs] Who the fuck wants a galley? And then when you've gotten love from Toni Morrison—it still didn't hit me. When I started seeing the reaction to it I thought, Oh, this is different.

PLAYBOY: Having Toni Morrison compare you to James Baldwin sounds like a big deal.

COATES: Yeah, but when she said that, I feel like people misconstrued it. I felt her point was "It's a space I felt I was looking for, a certain kind of analysis that I'm not getting, and I got it from this book—not from everything he'll write after it, not from anything he wrote before. It's just this book." I mean, Baldwin is not just The Fire Next Time.

PLAYBOY: I took it as her saying "This dude might be the next Baldwin." Do you often downplay your work?

COATES: The Baldwin thing, for me, was intentional. I love The Fire Next Time. You've got this essay in book form, dude is using journalism, using first person, the history, the literary criticism, all just kind of mashed together. He's talking about the most essential conflict of his day. Now here we are in this era, and motherfuckers are uploading videos of people getting choked to death, beaten on the street, black president. This seems like the moment for that form. Where's that book? My editor said to me, "The road is littered with motherfuckers who tried to do that." My agent knew Baldwin. She said, "You just don't come across as a Jimmy." [laughs] But she said, "I think you can do it." I tried the first time, it did not work. Second time, did not work. Third time—we've got something there.

PLAYBOY: What happened between the second and third drafts?

COATES: Between the second and third time, I literally printed out every page, went sentence by sentence and came up with a completely different structure. I assigned each paragraph to each heading where I thought it should belong, then I sat down and typed the whole thing out just to run it through the machine again. So it's not that I'm downplaying it. It's hard to step back and think about it as a finished thing. The fact of the matter is I've got to go do that again, and then again, and then again, and each time different. I've got to do some other shit now, and it's got to be of that

caliber It might fail, and there's no dishonor in failure

PLAYBOY: Since the book has come out, what's the biggest change you've noticed?

COATES: The book has given me and my family a level of financial security I never thought we would have and thus the freedom to go out and think, Okay, how are we really going to go out here and do this now? At the same time, I didn't realize how much heat there was

PLAYBOY: Some of that heat came from Cornel West, who basically said you were a neoliberal darling who wouldn't criticize Obama. Others, including author bell hooks, suggested the book was written more for white people than for your son.

COATES: The book couldn't have been out more than three days, and I saw this note. "Look, Cornel West is going after him." It was on a Facebook post, and it was clear it had almost nothing to do with the book Then bell hooks and Kevin Powell got together and went after the book with some bullshit It was like all the people I was reading in the 1990s were attacking the book I was like, Damn, what the fuck is this?

PLAYBOY: You had become a figure

COATES: Right And so you lose yourself They really are not talking about you. Glenn Loury was talking like, "Yeah, I only flipped through the first few pages, but this dude was bragging to his son about how he can find a gun." I wrote to him and was like, "Dude, you need to read the book. I didn't say none of that shit." My elders got their knives out. I don't want to say everybody, but people I'd really studied and learned from It's like, That's what it is now?

PLAYBOY: Did any of the criticism hurt?

COATES: All of it hurt. I had criticized Cornel for going after Obama, but not in that sort of personal way. The bell hooks shit hurt because she was talking about my son The Loury shit, that hurt Eventually I figured out that they were aiming at the gaze of white folks I didn't account for how much that shit controls everything I can't tell you how many times I've gone somewhere and the question has been "What's up with white people reading your book?" It alters everything. You're talking about money right there But I think on top of that it's the prestige part. "Oh, you're a MacArthur genius now?" Now people have to look at you a certain way and talk to you a certain way, and that has nothing to do with what you're actually saying People start shouting out your name and they ain't even talking about you

PLAYBOY: White people are not just reading it but have also gotten behind it Is that hard to comprehend?

COATES: It's easy The number of white people who read books is really small I mean, what are we, a country of 300 million? Two hundred million white folks? They haven't read Between the World and Me Another thing. A lot of the shit people think is crazy is not crazy at all in academia. If you talk to historians or sociologists and ask, "Is racism one of the most consistent themes in American history, without which you would have trouble conceiving of the country at all?" they say, "Hell, yeah. I would go further than that." Is this country reading its own historians? It was really radical in my folks' home, and I thought some of that shit was crazy. Then I started reading these historians. A lot of it wasn't crazy, and a lot of it was true. There are enough "elite" people in academia who can provide the evidence for it. You might not like how it sounds, but the consensus in academia is pretty clear. When I saw that? I ain't got to fight you with what's on 125th. I can fight you with your own people That's Harvard and Yale I've got your history department Like that great Chuck D line, "You check out the books they own."

PLAYBOY: Did you get any pushback from people who'd worked on reparations for years about you becoming the face of that movement?

COATES: By and large people were extremely excited to see this taken seriously This is what my pops and that generation fought for. This is what was supposed to happen. This is the fruit. The 1960s and 1970s, a lot of the shit they were saying, it's like a scientist who intuitively feels himself to be correct but doesn't have the science. "Everything I know about this tells me it's that way I ain't got the scholarship, but I know what direction it's supposed to go." For the next generation, folks like us, we went off to school, read some things I was able to bring to bear tools they didn't necessarily have. And it was like, "Everything you thought was intuitively correct? I got it now. You used to say this whole thing was built on slavery—got it. Footnoting and everything, we got it." How many black folks wanted to do something like this but just couldn't?

If nothing ever changes, that does not relieve me of the responsibility to tell the truth as I see it.

PLAYBOY: How was it growing up as a pan-African in the 1980s and 1990s?

COATES: I've always felt black, but I always felt a little outside that real black shit "Come on, man, we don't celebrate Christmas, we don't celebrate Thanksgiving, we don't go to church." Really? That's what we're doing now? It became cool when I was 13, when Public Enemy came out

PLAYBOY: And you had to carry that name

COATES: Oh my God, that was the worst I'm like, "Can I just get a normal name?" And then I went out in the world and realized this was a normal name. [laughs] I had a crush on a girl whose name was Mwaneisha. I knew plenty of girls with names like that What was I supposed to say about that, you know?

PLAYBOY: Does the class difference between how you grew up and how your son is growing up ever worry you?

COATES: No I feel like I learned certain stuff the way I grew up, and those things helped me later But the amount of violence in black communities is just off the hook, so I think it's a net negative. You've got to put it on balance. I think everybody who goes through that says, "Well, I'm gonna toughen him up." See, these white folks ain't got to be tough Tough is for people without money

PLAYBOY: Is there anything related to race that you once believed and now look back on and say, "What was I thinking?"

COATES: Yeah, there are crazy things that I believed. That whole iceman thing was total bullshit.

PLAYBOY: I take it you're talking about Michael Bradley's book The Iceman Inheritance, which attributes white racism to, among other things, sexual maladaptation in Caucasians.

COATES: See, these motherfuckers believe shit now and argue on it. I've had these fights with Andrew Sullivan about IQ. That's his iceman. There's no science behind this shit. But see, you've got institutions and guns behind it, right? You've got a whole power structure behind it that allows them to stand on the crazy shit I could not go out on. When I went to Howard they were like, "Ain't no way you're going to leave here talking that shit." These motherfuckers get to go to Harvard and come out talking that shit. Charles Murray did this bubble study. Did you see that shit?

PLAYBOY: I did not.

COATES: How to determine whether you live in a bubble or not. It's totally based on white people. No black person would take that study and have it tell them anything about their life. This motherfucker got the backing of Washington. These motherfuckers just get to spout crazy. This cat Marty Peretz, who used to run The New Republic, was an active racist and bigot spouting the worst poison in the world. This guy is in high reaches of society, getting degrees from Harvard. My pops said this shit to me one time: "The African's right to be wrong is sacred." When we're wrong, it's craziness, but when they're wrong, it's Harvard.

Part of the way racism works is through imagery, through reinforcing certain ideas. Symbols matter.

PLAYBOY: In your back-and-forths with Sullivan and Jonathan Chait, they seemed to be wondering what was wrong with you. What was your thought when people said you seemed down, when you believed you were dealing in facts?

COATES: That's what they say when they can't fight you. They abandon the whole thought of any sort of empirical, historical, evidence-based argument, and they say, "Well, I don't like where you're coming from." It's like if I tell you I have empirical evidence that the world is going to end in five days and you're like, "I don't like how that sounds. Why are you bumming me out?" That's something people apply to the dialogue around racism but they don't apply to other shit. Kathryn Schulz won a Pulitzer Prize for this incredible piece that basically says the Pacific Northwest is going to get hit by a huge tsunami that will kill a lot of people. It's the most pessimistic, dire shit you'd ever want to read. What if they said to Schulz, "You could sing us a song"? When people can't fight you, they say, "Why are you so pessimistic?" It's a different question than "Are you correct?"

PLAYBOY: You also wrote in the book about being an atheist. Did you have any reservations about sharing that?

COATES: No. I don't know why either.

PLAYBOY: I mean, you could say you worship a different god in America.

COATES: Right, you can be spiritual. It's difficult to explain my perspective in that book without talking about atheism. So much of the black perspective is built on this notion of transcendent spiritual victory, and I had to explain why I was estranged from that. You know what I mean? How I'm going to get around that. I've got to tell them, otherwise, it's not going to be true. There's another question: Why are all these black church people reading Between the World and Me? I mean, people are teaching the book in church. That I did not expect.

PLAYBOY: Do you worry about going further than your audience is ready to go?

COATES: No, because I wrote for 12 years and had no audience. I'm prepared for it to go. I loved writing before this and I will love writing after this. I loved it when it made no money. I love it now that it makes more money. I will love it when it goes back to making no money again. It's not for that. And the minute you let them take it from you, the minute it becomes for them, you are lost.

PLAYBOY: How good do you think you are at writing?

COATES: I'm a good writer. I think there are very few people who can do journalism, do history, form an argument, an argument with a brain, and then write in such a way that it gets at your heart also. I'm thinking about Isabel Wilkerson. I think of Nikole Hannah-Jones. I think Elizabeth Kolbert at The New Yorker is really good at that. I'm talking about making an argument that's simple, with all this evidence, and writing about it in a beautiful way. There are very few people who can do all of it at the same time, and that's because very few people actually try.

Coming up on hip-hop really taught me the beauty of poetry. Reading comic books taught me the beauty of poetry. Studying poetry after that, I had this obsession with how language sounded. Coming out of my household and being a history major at Howard gave me a deep appreciation for history. Working under David Carr as a journalist gave me a deep appreciation for actually going out and talking to people. So I had a variety of experiences, but it's not mystical. It's not in the genes or in the bones.

PLAYBOY: You've said that when you look at yourself in the mirror you see a guy who got fired three times. Do you think there will ever be a point when you'll look in the mirror and see the dude who changed the game with Between the World and Me?

COATES: No, because that remains to be seen. And the game could get changed back. Listen, I went and started this damn comic book, Black Panther, and it's like, Oh yeah, this is hard. Things don't just flow out of your brain. It's not like, Hey, I'm brilliant. Show up, paper right here, bam, another banger. No—you sit and

you struggle with yourself and you stop cutting your hair. I'm not cutting my hair right now. You stop shaving, like I'm not shaving right now. You remember that you can fail. I've failed several times. The fact that everybody else don't see that don't give me the right to not see it.

PLAYBOY: Did you think when you said you were voting for Bernie Sanders that it would turn into a de facto endorsement?

COATES: No, I didn't see that coming at all. [*laughs*] I've got to be more self-aware. But after that, it became really hard to write about the election. I damn near can't write anything without people being like, "Oh, this dude is weighing in." I don't know why people say, "You're voting for Bernie Sanders, that enforces my vote for him." You need to think for yourself.

PLAYBOY: Has being in France changed the way you view yourself as an American?

COATES: France was the first place where that was the first thing people saw when I talked. It reminds me that the first thing they think in America is, Oh, you're black. Here, the first thing they think is, You're American, maybe black American. They're racist as hell, but the sociology that comes out of slavery is a little different from the sociology that comes out of colonialism. France colonized all sorts of people—Asian people, black people, whoever. So the relationship is a little different. It's not a good relationship. But America has a very specific thing with black people. Here, the people who get it the worst are actually the Muslims, so it's not like they're cured. But slavery did something to America, it did some shit.

PLAYBOY: Are you looking forward to going back to the States?

COATES: Yeah. And then coming back here. [*laughs*]

PLAYBOY: What do you miss?

COATES: My friends, mostly. My friends and my family.

PLAYBOY: Nothing particular to the country?

COATES: The country is the people to me, and I miss the people. There are things I don't have here that are very different but that I don't miss. I don't know if you'll see this over the next few days or whether you've seen it already, but America is a much freer place. France is actually maybe a culturally more conservative place. "We ain't open on Sunday. Deal with it. Period." In America, somebody's trying to make some money; somebody's always saying, "I'm open over here. What's up?" You know, my butcher ain't open on Monday. And during the week he shuts down from 12 to three. He works, like, 20 hours the whole week.

PLAYBOY: What role does hip-hop play in your work?

COATES: I always considered myself a failed MC. That was what I really wanted to do. I was listening to that old Quincy Jones album Back on the Block. Big Daddy Kane says, "Back up and give the brother room to let poetry bloom to whom it might concern or consume." I heard that and thought, Good God, there's so much in that. It's the kind of faux majesty of it, "to whom." It's actually really regal. I heard something like that as a kid, and it was like these cats were taking the language from its inventors and retrofitting it to explain their reality. Nas didn't need to go to Harvard, or even Howard, to become masterful in the use of language. I think great rappers, because of how stuff is structured, really understand on an intuitive level how to get across as much information as possible in the smallest amount of space.

In terms of literary inspirations, hip-hop's got to be number one, and I'm talking above actual literature. Aesthetically, it defines how I try to write. You really have to think hard about every single word. Probably a hundred years from now people will look back on something like Illmatic, some of that Wu-Tang stuff, some of the Kendrick stuff, some of the other stuff, and they're just going to be like, "Holy hell." You're talking some of the greatest wordsmiths of our age.

PLAYBOY: Have you been able to impart some of that to your son?

COATES: My son is doing it for me now. I did when he was younger, but music requires the time to actually dig, you know what I'm saying? He has always been open to stuff I play, but now he's the one who tells me, "Yo, you should check this out." He got me on the new Rihanna album. He's like, "Man, you really would like this."

PLAYBOY: So you trust his taste in music.

COATES: He has great taste in music. I don't know if it's because I was relatively young when he was born—I was 24—but I don't have that whole "Cut that off! I'm going to show you how we used to do it back in the day!" I took him to this foreign-language camp about a summer ago, and one of my great memories is just listening to his music all the way up there. It was good stuff too.

PLAYBOY: How is learning French going?

COATES: It's always hard. I'm in my fourth year of studying, and I think I speak like a four-year-old child, which is progress. My first summer here I actually took classes, and at the end I was like, I think I have some sort of brain injury. Coming back, it was a lot easier. I've had to go out and talk about the book. I can generally understand the questions from the person who's giving them to me, but I usually have the answers translated. And sometimes I actually give the answer in French.

PLAYBOY: That has to be humbling.

COATES: I think I seek out difficulty. At this point, when people are handing you things and giving you all these accolades, and you go somewhere and they're basically, "Who are you? You can't even talk to us." You know what I mean? Like, "You really ain't shit." It takes it back. I need that in my life.

PLAYBOY: With these recurring themes in history, how do you avoid writing about the same thing over and over?

COATES: You just don't write. I've been trying for the past two weeks to write about the 1994 Violent Crime Control Act without rewriting. I wrote "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration" back in October, and then when Bill Clinton went crazy.

PLAYBOY: When he was trying to defend his crime bill to Black Lives Matter protesters in Philadelphia earlier this year?

COATES: Yeah. I was sitting there trying to write, and I got about three paragraphs in and was like, This is deceptive. It's just saying the same shit. You said it, and either they heard you or they didn't. It's not up to you.

PLAYBOY: Does the fact that these things keep happening make you question the utility of your work?

COATES: No, because you have no control over that. Ida B. Wells went all through the South, reporting on lynchings and everything. Nothing changed, not in her lifetime. If nothing ever changes, that does not relieve me of the responsibility to tell the truth as I see it.

PLAYBOY: Some would make the argument that you have become the voice on these issues. How does that make you feel?

COATES: It makes me sad that people don't read more black writers. I want the notion of there having to be "the voice" for black folks completely obliterated. There is no one voice on climate change. There's no one person on sports. I think that allows for a kind of laziness among nonblack people who don't want to read other people's shit. It saves them from having to compare me with other writers who are not black. It allows them to say, "You're king of the blacks over here." The journalism I'm making stands up with any of these white folks you want to put up. If you want to have a conversation about where I stand in my field, we can talk about that. I'm black, very proud to be black, standing within the tradition of other black writers. That's my culture, that's my ethnicity, that's my struggle, that's my tradition, that's my literature, but don't use that as an excuse not to explore that tradition.

PLAYBOY: Are you comfortable with being thought of as perhaps the best voice on these issues?

COATES: No, because when people say that, they are often unqualified. Very few black people say that to me. Why do we think about black folks like this? I'm practicing a craft, and if you want to talk about best, compare me to other craftsmen. I'm interested in a particular question, but why would you compare me only to other people who are interested only in that question?

PLAYBOY: When was the last time somebody important to you fundamentally disagreed with something you'd written or done?

COATES: I wrote a column defending the use of the word nigger, and my buddy Ben and his wife, Janai—they're mentioned in the book—were like, "It's total bullshit."

PLAYBOY: Why is that the thing that gets people so charged up?

COATES: The nigger thing? I understand if you're black and you say, "Man, I had white people call me this shit all my life. They called me this shit when they hit me upside the head, and I don't want to hear it." I understand that. But that ain't everybody's experience. I've never had a white person call me a nigger. I had somebody call me le négre here in France, but I was 38 years old and I couldn't have cared less. It didn't mean anything. So not all of us come out of that experience.

PLAYBOY: How would you describe the eight years of Obama's presidency?

COATES: I think he did a tremendous job, and I say that with all my criticism of how he talks about black folks and how he talks to black folks. I say that with all my criticism of the morality or the lack of morality in terms of drone warfare. You're not voting for a civil rights leader; you're voting for a president of the United States within the boundaries of what presidents do. And within the boundaries of what presidents do, he's easily the greatest president in my lifetime. I don't think people understand what he had to navigate. It's a hard job already. You've got people on TV—and this is just the small end of it—on the internet, everywhere, sending out pictures of you and your wife looking like apes. You've got officials in the opposing party e-mailing pictures of watermelon patches in front of the White House. You have an opposition party where somewhere on the order of 50 or 60 percent don't think you are legally president. You're giving the State of the Union address and some white dude from South Carolina stands up and yells, "You lie." Just open, blatant disrespect. You say the most sensible things in the world and people lose their mind, almost scuttling your top agenda in terms of legislation. You've got to be a certain motherfucker to be able to manage all that in your head. Their leading presidential candidate right now is the person who claimed our president was born somewhere else and asked to see his grades. You're dealing with a party where racism is a significant undercurrent. I mean, whew.

PLAYBOY: Were you surprised by the level of obstruction?

COATES: I was surprised by how much his very presence drew out the racism in the country. I didn't know these folks were basically going to double down. There's stuff we don't even remember. In the 2012 Republican primary, Newt Gingrich just comes out and calls this dude a food-stamp president. I mean, just says it. This is a respectable figure in American politics right now. Five years from now, people will be looking back on this presidency and talking about how great the times were. Ten years from now, Republicans will be talking about how whoever is the Democratic nominee at that point is not like Obama and how magisterial Obama was. Twenty-five, 30 years from now, they're going to put his face on the money, if we still have money. And 50 years from now—it might not even take that long—he will be considered one of the greatest presidents in American history.

PLAYBOY: Did you have to reconcile what you wanted Obama to be with what he turned out to be?

COATES: No. I think my politics are significantly more radical than that of most people in the black community. That the first black president would not have my politics or my way of addressing folks is not particularly surprising to me. That does not relieve me of my responsibility to say, "This is wrong and here's why." But I understand where he's coming from. I think Obama loves

black people. I think he likes being black. Is it a mistake that he's attracted to Chicago—for my money, the capital of black America—and participates within the institutions there? That he married a woman who is from there and lives there? I don't think you do any of that without having a sincere affection for black folks. You can feel somebody has a sincere appreciation for black folks and just think they're dead wrong.

PLAYBOY: What's the importance to you of having a black family in the White House?

COATES: That shit replaced The Cosby Show, didn't it? I think it's important, because culture is important. If having no black family there was important, then having one there is important. When you're the most famous black folks in the country—I mean, I don't want to fall too much into the romance of it, but imagery matters. That's the most public picture of us for eight years. That has to have some impact on white people, and I'm talking about white children. Part of the way racism works is through imagery, through reinforcing certain ideas. It's not policy, but symbols matter.

PLAYBOY: The women in your life don't get mentioned much in your books. Is there a reason for that?

COATES: Well, the woman in my life is in the second book. She has her own life, and she deserves that. The book is dedicated to her. I would not be here without her. But she deserves her space. I don't particularly enjoy all the attention, and I know just from talking to her that she would not enjoy it. To some extent, it's the type of book that both those were. To another extent, I just don't want to drag her into this.

PLAYBOY: So it's protection as much as it is respect?

COATES: Or more respect than protection. I don't know if she needs protection, but respect, yeah.

PLAYBOY: Were you surprised by the discussion about the lack of women in Between the World and Me?

COATES: Not surprised. I wouldn't change that about that book, though. That book is 176 pages. It is what it is. My view on art, though, is a little different from most people's. When Girls first came out, there was this whole thing: "Why is Girls so white?" I want Lena Dunham to make the show she wants to make, I just want other people to have the chance to make shows too. The problem is not that Lena Dunham's world is totally white. That's her world. She's an artist. She's not a policy maker. But there are other worlds too, and other people should have the opportunity to put those worlds on display. It's the same for Between the World and Me, and this takes it back to the whole thing of being the best or the most representative. A book can't carry the entire weight of all the nuance and texture of the black community. It's just one dude who not too long ago was on unemployment. What people need to do is read other folks. This is not the only African American memoir. There's other stuff out there that should be explored.

PLAYBOY: What was unemployment like?

COATES: I was scared. I was scared for my son and, at that time, my girlfriend. I didn't have anything else to offer the world, so this was going to be it. Either it was going to hit or it wasn't, but this was what I was going to do. I had dropped out of school. I had no proof that I was capable of doing much else. I had been laid off from Time magazine. That was the third job I'd lost, and I was like, Maybe I don't have it, but I have to do it, I don't have anything else. So it was incredibly scary.

PLAYBOY: Dealing with your partner then, was it "You can do it!" or more like "So you know you've got to get a job, right?"

COATES: I wanted to drive a taxicab, but she was like, "I think you need to spend more time writing." She'd say that over and over again. It was never "Go get a job." I'm happy she was right. She had faith, "You're going to go out and break the world. You just need to keep doing it." She was right. That's insane. I couldn't see it.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever feel insecure when you're around academics?

COATES: No, I just want to listen more. I wish they would stop asking me what I think. [laughs] No, I don't feel insecure. They tell me I'm wrong and here's why I'm wrong. I've had that before, and that's cool. I look for that. I still feel like a student. If I'm wrong, I'm wrong.

PLAYBOY: In 25 years, how do you think we'll remember the Black Lives Matter movement?

COATES: I think that depends on what happens. I think it has been pretty effective. This whole conversation about body cameras, retraining the New York Police Department, the way Ferguson went down and the report that came out, I think they've been tremendously effective. One of the reasons movements like that get criticized is they say, "Well, what are you about? What specific thing?" But you've seen specifics come out of this.

PLAYBOY: Why do you think this has happened at this time?

COATES: It's totally the technology and the ability to get people assembled relatively quickly. It's not original in the sense that, in large part, the civil rights movement was very much a product of TV cameras and photography. So it's not totally surprising or unprecedented.

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about the way the presidential candidates have dealt with that movement?

COATES: They know it about as well as they can. I had high expectations for Bernie. I thought he would have known certain things. I don't know how you're a candidate on the left in the Democratic Party but not really competing for the black vote. You ain't got to come out for reparations, but you've got to speak to these people who've lived their lives not just as colorless victims of Wall Street, because they're black—not as some sort of accident but because of who they are. You've got to have some sort of facility with that, and I don't think he does. I don't think Bernie's a bad person or doesn't care about black people. I think you need staff around you to say, "Yo, when you go to South Carolina, you've got to do this, you've got to do that." He just didn't have that.

PLAYBOY: What do you think about Hillary Clinton?

COATES: I don't know what's going to happen under Hillary Clinton. Obviously she's preferable to Donald Trump, and I don't blame black folks who vote for her or support her. I get it. But I just don't know. When I see her husband defending her use of the "superpredator," come on. Talking about how the crime bill actually cut crime, come on. Stand back. Defending welfare reform at this hour? Here's the thing that's most damning for me. How do you take $600,000 from Goldman Sachs for speeches, knowing you're going to run for president? Somebody says, "What were you doing?" and you say, "Well, that's what they offered." It's a disturbing lack of personal judgment. So it scares me.

PLAYBOY: Is there anyone whose style you'd like to emulate?

COATES: Toni Morrison, because she doesn't really talk. She does interviews, but she's not, like, out there. People forget how viciously she was attacked in the 1980s, but at the end of the day, the work just stands for itself. Also, she has this kind of regalness.

I'd like to be quieter. I think I'd like to be quieter and let the work speak for itself.

SAMPLE
BOOM!
GUARDIANS
OF THE GALAXY

BLACK PANTHER
TA-NEHISI COATES
A NATION UNDER OUR FEET BOOK ONE
MARVEL

10 MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

You can't have a revolution without rest. Here are some therapy resources for Black Americans

BY THE PLAYBOY EDITORS

non-Black person in America, there are plenty of resources out there for you on how to support this movement with your time, your voice or your wallet.

For Black Americans, sometimes the most important mode of [illegible] your own mental health and emotional

(NQTTCN)

NQTTCN is a healing justice organization working to transform mental health for queer and trans people of color through increased access to QTPoC healthcare practitioners and increased access to healing justice resources. @nqttcn

[illegible] promote and sponsor educational [illegible] support the health and well-bein[illegible] for clinicians to connect with patients as well as educate [illegible], provide community workshops, and school-based

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

NAMI was formed in 1979 and has since become a leading [illegible]ce for mental health education, advocacy and action. The

Licensed therapists Eliza Boquin and Eboni Harris [illegible] Melanin and Mental Health to connect therapy-seeking individuals with clinicians who serve Black and Latinx communities. Their [illegible] includes an online directory and podcast, as well as events

own investigations and decisi[illegible] about whether to use any of these services. Providing these links does not imply any endorsement by Playboy.

OUR ACTION PLAN

As co-founder of the Black Panther Party Huey Newton said in the pages of PLAYBOY magazine in 1973, "America will not be changed until the world is changed. To say that change will come here just through the ballot box would be a fantasy." We're here to do the work. After listening to our Black employees, we devised a deliberate and strategic social-impact plan that focuses on people, policy and culture. Here is our blueprint.

BY PLAYBOY

PEOPLE

Playboy Can't Change Others Without Changing Itself

"You develop courage by doing the small things that take courage. Like not sitting in a room where racial pejoratives are used. Like not sitting in a room where gay people are being bashed. I won't do it." —Maya Angelou, 1999

We recognize that marginalized members of our community are the most vulnerable to systemic racism and social injustice. Here is what we are doing to protect, support and amplify our own community.

We commit to hiring more people of color. We are committed to having a truly diverse organization, from our leadership to our contributors. For more than 66 years, we have stood for racial equality and civil liberties—we hold ourselves accountable to making sure that this work starts from within.

We are undertaking initiatives to create space for reflection, education and conversations that bring advocacy to the forefront. As such, we are committing to education through recurring discussions and internal forums to unpack implicit bias and give space for issues to be raised and voices to be heard.

We will host monthly social-impact roundtable meetings to discuss the issues and human rights violations that demand Playboy's focus. We commit to creating a space where employees feel safe to have open dialogues.

To support these monthly meetings, we will create a Slack channel where team members can share resources, articles, initiatives and petitions. We must stay informed and ensure critical conversations stay top-of-mind. The fundamental purpose is to share a consistent stream of data and information that employees feel their peers should be aware of and informed about. It can also be a source

that determines the agenda for each monthly meeting

Playboy Legal Support: We commit to donating pro-bono legal hours to nonprofit organizations in need of such support.

Playboy Mentorship Program: We also commit to the mentorship of formerly incarcerated individuals and those whose opportunities have been unjustly stifled. This support will take the form of pro-bono hours donated by our Career Development team.

The Playboy Purse Is Open

We are putting our money where our mouth is by relaunching the Playboy Foundation with a $250,000 initial fund to support organizations fighting injustice. The Playboy Foundation is immediately donating $150,000 to organizations committed to Black liberation. After internal discussion and research, we have chosen to center our efforts on aiding smaller grassroots organizations that make a direct impact on the freedom, safety and support of Black lives.

POLICIES

"The Constitution did not seek to transform power itself. Instead it ensured that more people had access to the ultimately corrupt forms of power that some had been denied." -Black Lives Matter co-founder Alicia Garza, Spring 2020

Playboy understands that change will come not only from the streets but also from the halls of power. We will use our editorial platforms to take a position on policies that are required to dismantle white supremacy and systemic racism. Key issues are summarized below.

Criminal Justice: The U.S. criminal justice system is a glaring and undeniable example of structural racism in this country. We must work to end mass incarceration through changes including pre-trial reform, ending mandatory minimum sentencing, and the removing cannabis from Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act.

Public Safety: We support allocating a greater percentage of municipal funds toward efforts that have been proven to reduce the need for law enforcement, including more significant investments in education and youth programming, mental health services, community development and safe and affordable housing. We call for the diversification of law enforcement teams and mandatory anti-bias training. Deadly and unnecessary force in policing must end now. We must work to solve our problems at the source rather than treat the symptoms.

Voter Suppression: We seek to put an end to voter suppression through increasing access to voter registration, vote by mail and early voting. Efforts to disenfranchise voters disproportionately impact people of color and deprive U.S. citizens of their constitutional right to a voice in our democracy.

Reparations: We support the passage of the H.R.40 Bill, also known as the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act. Black Americans have been robbed of generations of wealth and opportunity—from slavery to the Black Wall Street massacre of 1921 to today's career-advancement discrimination and mass incarceration. By not providing reparations for these heinous human rights violations, the United States is perpetuating that original harm.

Health Care: Disparities in access to and quality of health care, along with persistent structural racism in the medical field, put Black lives at risk. These inequalities in health care have an even greater impact on Black women, who are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications as white women. We advocate for investing in programs to connect Black communities with quality, accessible health care, and in programs to expand representation and break down bias in the medical profession.

CULTURE

"The important thing is making sure this shit don't become a trend... We gotta fix ourselves in the culture." Lizzo, Spring 2019

At Playboy, we believe that Black culture is American culture. We will continue to use our channels to amplify diverse voices and social justice leaders and to call out practices that perpetuate white supremacy. Our mission is to change public perception and create a culture where all people feel free and safe to pursue their personal pleasure.

Amplification: We will spotlight the diverse voices we work with in a creative, editorial and activist capacity across all our channels, and proactively bring new voices into this community. To support Black Lives Matter today, we launched a dedicated website section, our Black Lives Matter hub, to provide:

- Regularly updated resources and information to share
- Profile key leaders in the movement
- Galleries and features on the work of Black artists, photographers and activists
- Resurfaced articles from our archives, available to the public for free, highlighting key Black thought leaders and voices we have profiled throughout our 66-year history

Internal Culture: We will lead by example. Each member of our executive team has made a personal commitment to donate their time to champion civil rights. We are committed to sourcing suppliers and partnerships with companies that share our values and have significant Black representation on their teams. This includes our auditing and financial partners, our legal resources, our creative agencies and the influencers we work with. And we will be collaborating with a civil rights legal organization to educate our employees on critical legal issues and to lend our support to their efforts.

Socially Responsible Investing: This week, we began working with our 401(k) plan provider to secure our team's access to multiple investment funds that consist solely of companies adhering to ESG (environmental, social and governance) best practices.

CONCLUSION

The Playboy platform reaches millions of people and has been a cultural touchstone for decades. Since our inception, we have been committed to provoking challenging conversations, educating ourselves and our audiences, and shedding light on new perspectives and experiences. It is our responsibility to stand up and speak up where we see injustice, to agitate for change where we can have an impact, and above all else, to seed that change from within. Today, we renew our commitment to using our voice, our brand, and our platform as a vehicle for change in our society. For Black Americans, know that you aren't alone in this fight. For Non-Black Americans, put your guilt and your privilege to meaningful use. Complacency, and thereby complicity, cannot be an option. Let's demand and create change together.

Welcome to **FLLWR,** where a comedian offers five recs carefully selected to amuse and inspire you in these unusual times

FLLWR

Follow, Listen, Laugh, Watch, Read: Five Recs From Comedian David Gborie

WRITTEN BY
DAVID GBORIE

INTRODUCTION
JAMES RICKMAN

Stand-up comedian and writer David Gborie was recently featured on Comedy Central Stand-Up Presents, delivering half an hour in which he compares doing cocaine to peeing your pants. He co-hosts the much-loved All Fantasy Everything podcast, which continues to air every week, thanks to Zoom.

Blvck Vrchives is just beautiful pictures. They do such a good job of capturing times and places. A lot of times when you see historical photos it's from more metropolitan areas—New York in the 1950s or whatever. With Blvck Vrchives, you see a family reunion in Arkansas, some guys smoking in Clinton, Tennessee, people dancing in a living room in Long Beach, stuff like that. Everyone looks so noble; it's just a great way to see blackness in all its forms. I get stuck looking at it for hours.

I grew up with her in my house. Obviously my mom was a big fan, and even as an adult I don't believe other singers in the way that I believe Whitney Houston. "Saving All My Love for You" is about her sleeping with a married man, and the point is that even though he's married, she's still not going to sleep with anyone else but him. That makes me want to cry, man, 'cause when you listen to her sing it, you feel her heart. It's all of the emotions. Part of it is sexy. She's like, "When I see you, it's on." But she's in such a fucked-up spot. She's like, "I know you got your family, and that's cool, and this is never going to be any more than this thing." But she loves that thing so much, and that gets me every time.

LAUGH

***Elephant in the Room* by Patrice O'Neal**

I'm a stand-up comic now, but stand-up didn't really connect with me growing up. And then right after I started doing it, Elephant in the Room came out, and it was the first time I saw somebody do comedy so effortlessly. I was like, Oh, you can just talk and be the best at it. And from a technical standpoint—he opens the special with crowd work, which no one ever does, and he kind of divides the audience into three parts and plays people against each other. If you can make me laugh at something I don't agree with, that's the hardest trick there is. And most of the stuff Patrice O'Neal says I don't agree with at all. And when you watch it, it doesn't fucking matter.

WATCH

People Just Do Nothing

I don't tend to watch a lot of British stuff, but People Just Do Nothing is real weird and so much fun. It's a documentary-style show about these guys who live on an estate—England's version of projects. They run a hardcore drum-and-bass pirate radio station called Kurupt FM, and it only broadcasts to their estate, so only people on that estate can listen to it. There are these typical delusions of grandeur, like the main guy thinking he's a real rapper and being obsessed with Jamaica even though he's not Jamaican at all. So much comedy is about rich people, because then they don't have problems and they can focus on the comedy. I like shows about normal people. I like it when the relationships are complicated, especially in comedy. It's the opposite of my humor, and the harder it is to do, the more I appreciate the magic of it.

READ

***Makes Me Wanna Holler* by Nathan McCall**

This guy had a difficult youth, did a bunch of crimes, eventually shot somebody, went to prison, got out and ended up becoming a journalist. When I first read his memoir (I was about 14 or 15), I was interested in this guy's youth, right? But as an adult I realized that it's just as interesting to read about how he reintegrated into society. That second act of Makes Me Wanna Holler, about how somebody can come back from a difficult life, is just the best. I often think that life is about distance traveled—not physical as much as emotional and mental. And with that guy, the distance traveled is just incredible.

This Is an
UPRISING

When it comes to whiteness and privilege in America, there are no innocent bystanders

By **ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON**

It was after midnight, and I'd just turned 36 years old. The estimated life expectancy for a trans woman of color had once been reported to be just 35. As I lay in bed facing the ceiling, tears made their way from the outer corners of my eyes and down the nape of my neck. I thought about everyone who had trudged with me through one of the most disenfranchised chapters of my life. Yet unlike myself, they didn't make it. I thought about what their story would have been like had they received the opportunities I've been given over the years; they were most definitely worthy of them.

Although I'd officially "made it" and beat the statistic, the sense of urgency I'd carried prior to turning 36 hadn't dissipated in the least bit. Instead, I continue to carry the burden of making sure my trans sisters "made it" as well. It's what Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera would have done, and the fact that I'd beaten the most insurmountable odds while dangerously marginalized, proved me to be indomitable. In the words of Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, p"When the dust settles, I want a whole bunch of transgender girls to stand up and say, I'm still fucking here." I am still determined to push back against racial and gender-based injustices, now armed with the belief that Black trans women are not statistics. We are our ancestors' greatest hopes, dreams and aspirations—and we deserve the chance to manifest our own.

My work isn't done simply because I beat out a statistic formed by a system that continues to produce the conditions that keep those statistics in place. We must dismantle systemic transmisogynoir, which describes our experiences at the intersections of racism, sexism and transphobia. In the LGBTQ community, I'm faced with anti-blackness. In the feminist movement, I'm faced with the erasure of my womanhood. And in the Black community I have to prove that Black trans lives matter too, without my plight being deemed a distraction from collective Black liberation.

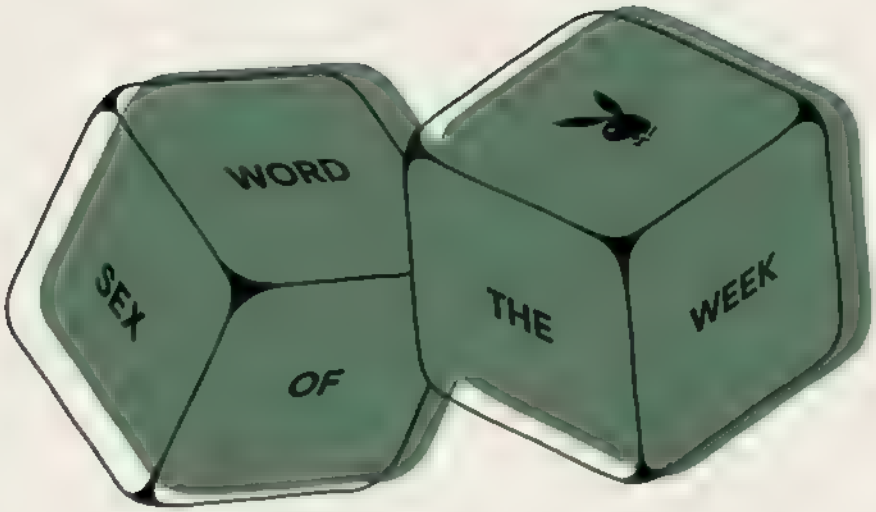
If anyone were to zoom out and examine the obstacle course Black trans women have to navigate in order to have our essential needs met, and be treated with basic respect and dignity, it would become abundantly clear as to why we succumb to our circumstances. When we exist outside of the lines of respectability, we're not offered employment. If we're not employed, we don't have access to housing or healthcare. If we don't have either of those, many of us engage in riskier survival-based behaviors that cause greater health disparities and also find ourselves caught in the clutches of the prison industrial complex. And that's if we're not murdered by someone who preys on our vulnerability. When these experiences overlap with one another, a precious life is ripped away from the world.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it compounded the pre-existing challenges Black trans women face. Concerned for everyone, especially Black trans women, I immediately got to work. Typically, I'd be in the field providing direct aid, or on the frontline protesting for racial justice given the recent string of Black murders. However, I have asthma and other respiratory complications, making

If a White person isn't actively working to dismantle systems of anti-Blackness, they're actively benefiting from it.

Allyship was never meant to be convenient. It was never meant to be comfortable, come with a reward card, more followers, or pats on the back.

reminded
our movement work. Once you've taken the
ing an open heart and mind, willing feet
trans
and/or
When it comes to whiteness and privi



Sex Surrogate

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

surrogate partner therapy or SPT (*noun*) a therapeutic relationship between a therapist, a client and a surrogate partner that is designed to help the client achieve better sexual intimacy

In order to feel comfortable with penetrative intercourse after a painful experience, Mia talked to her therapist about enlisting the services of a sex surrogate

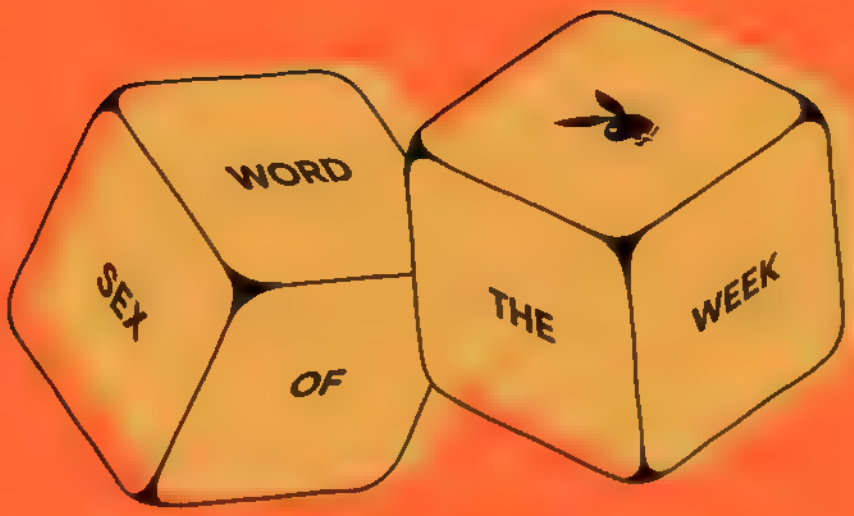
Most people are familiar with the term surrogate when it comes to pregnancy, but fewer are aware of how it can apply to sex. Surrogate partner therapy refers to the relationship between a client, a partner surrogate and—this part is really important—a licensed therapist, usually but not always a sex therapist.

The goal of this form of therapy is to encourage the client to become more comfortable with intimacy and sexuality. It's about opening up the client's body and mind to be more receptive to pleasure. Sex can be a source of anxiety or fear for a lot people, and a sex surrogate helps the client confront and navigate those emotions. With SPT, they can be sexually vulnerable in a safe space. The work of a sex surrogate includes, but is not limited to, breathwork, meditation exercises, mutual touching and, yes, occasionally sexual intercourse, depending on the boundaries established between the client, the surrogate and the therapist.

People who may benefit from the use of a sex surrogate are survivors of sexual trauma, those with erectile dysfunction or premature ejaculation, those who suffer from vaginismus or other pelvic floor dysfunctions that make penetration painful, those who live with body dysmorphia or those who just get super nervous with anything related to sex.

It is common for sex surrogates to be conflated with sex workers, especially in relationships where the surrogate has committed to having intercourse as part of the therapy. But they are not the same. The primary mission of sex surrogacy is healing, not sexual release.

If you've thoroughly researched it or had it recommended by your sex therapist, sex surrogacy can be a transformative way to reclaim your sexuality and restore confidence.



Ahegao

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

ahegao (*n*) a term from Japanese porn that describes a facial expression of extreme sexual ecstasy

In 2019, it seemed streetwear fans couldn't get enough of the ahegao trend, with illustrations of the lewd facial expression blanketing hoodies and backpacks.

If you're an anime geek, you may already be familiar with this term, which comes from the world of Japanese cartoons. Ahegao refers to the exaggerated facial expression a woman character has during the throes of sexual ecstasy. What does it look like? Well, feel free to do a Google Image search, but an ahegao illustration usually depicts flushed cheeks, crossed eyes, a protruding tongue and occasionally tears, sweat or drool emerging from one's face. To put it colloquially, ahegao is a pornified, ahnold absurdist version of an O-face. The expression is meant to show a complete loss of control and the utter surrender of one's senses during climax.

This isn't a new term. It has been associated with hentai (anime pornography) and other forms of Japanese erotic art since the 1960s, but, thanks to the internet, it has taken on a vibrant life of its own outside of hentai. Ahegao now has an almost inescapable presence in meme culture, with people using it as an emoji to express their extreme approval or delight at something. And if one [illegible] appear that some female influencers have even built entire followings around their ability to mimic the perfect ahegao face. Gamer girl and cosplay model Belle Delphine is one of the biggest internet stars to popularize and capitalize on the ahegao trend, boasting nearly a quarter-million followers on Instagram and a freshly minted OnlyFans account with nearly 100,000 likes.

Ahegao has entered streetwear culture as well, with erotic ahegao hoodies enjoying so much hype last year that they attracted controversy and ended up being banned from several major anime conventions. The godfather of hentai, Toshio Maeda, even did an ahegao-inspired collaboration with popular streetwear brand Supreme that included sweatshirts, T-shirts and pillows.

Being a flawless combination of hot but goofy, ahegao seems to hit a psychosexual sweet spot, and it doesn't look like it will be leaving internet culture anytime soon.

POWER IN HER PRESENCE
Cristal

Hi Cristal it is so lovely to have you on the Playboy family. Tell us about the moment you found out you would be featured in the magazine. What was your initial reaction? Thank you for the invitation and this amazing experience. It's a real honor to be on the cover of Playboy Australia It's a real gift from God and a blessing. I thank all my fans because thanks to you I'm here. I never dreamt that one day I would be in Playboy, it's a blessing. It's like a fairy tale, how an ordinary girl from a small town in Poland, who had to overcome many hardships throughout her life, ends up on the cover of Playboy. My biggest dream has come true. The Playboy invitation has helped me believe in myself even more. It has given me a lot of hope and belief that everything is possible and the world is waiting for me. An unforgettable experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. Thank you. The most beautiful things in my life always happen by accident. I remember the feeling of excitement when I received an invitation to the first Playboy. An unforgettable feeling came with the next invitation from Playboy and now I can reveal that there will be more in the future and other magazines, interviews, and guest appearances in artists' video clips. All this helped me believe in myself, in the fight against complexes, but above all, interacting and working with all these wonderful people photographers, models, and musicians created me as an artist and I decided to start my own perfume brand which is created entirely by me and the scents are inspired by my memories from traveling to my magical places and my cosmetic brand to leave some kind of legacy and be able to fulfill my dreams about a foundation supporting young talents and people with autism.

Which three words describe you the best? I think is more than three lol' loyal, respectful, honest, patient, optimistic, trustworthy, solid, and goodhearted

If you could be any animal, what would you be and why? Maybe a beautiful butterfly so I could fly as well maybe in my ex's life (cos I believe in reincarnation) I was a butterfly because I'm multitalented and my soul and generally life are so colorful like a butterfly I even often have dreams in which I fly and these dreams are so real and how well I know the skills and memories from the past.

How do you define true success, and do you feel like you're living it? I think that the measure of success is the realization of your own dreams. I think that I have achieved some kind of success in my life, something that I can be proud of with my hard work, and perseverance of character, but it is only thanks to you, my readers, and your support. I love you and I am always mentally with you.

What's the boldest decision you've ever made that changed your life? Without a doubt, it was leaving my homeland, which is Poland It was the most difficult experience that shaped me into who I am today

What's one thing you've always wanted to do but haven't dared to try yet? Definitely a parachute jump and a balloon flight.

A lot of young women look up to you, what advice would you give them on pursuing their own dreams? One of the most important lessons I have learned in my life is: to be true to myself This means not just in my personal life, but at work, too. Quite a few people have challenged me over the years, saying that you can't run a business based on personal values. But I completely disagree. You need to identify the opportunity, act on it, and not give up until you have a solution Try not to change under pressure from others be yourself be authentic and natural. My basic values are respect and loyalty. I treat others the way I would like to be treated In my career, I've had lots of moments when I feel I've achieved something and also lots of other moments when something has gone wrong. I've learned that it helps to use neither to define who you are or what you can achieve There are days when you won't put in much effort and everything good will fall in your lap. There are other days when you will try your hardest and nothing will go right. That's just life But it important is to always remember Failure is a natural part of learning and an opportunity to grow. As I mentioned earlier. Even if stones land on your face every day, be strong and fight adversity, think positively. I am the best example that the impossible is possible. In moments of failure, don't waste time analyzing your mistakes They are your lesson for a better future. I want to go down in history as an icon of style and class. People with a great appetite for life, I think that I am already becoming an inspiration for people that it is worth believing in dreams because you just have to believe in yourself and start fulfilling them. I believe that the recipe for success is hard work and determination I am an example that the concept of impossible does not exist, starting from the covers of Playboy to the covers of the most prestigious magazines Additionally, I have developed my cosmetic brand focusing on perfume design, which was immediately picked up by the leading magazines on the market, making my perfume brand "JustFetish by Joanne" recognizable on the market. Currently, I have already appeared on several covers of magazines with bottles of my perfumes, and I already have more invitations to the next ones, as well as invitations to participate in perfume shows in the USA and Europe

Is there a dream brand or platform you'd love to work with? For years I have had a great fondness for the Louis Vuitton brand, it is an icon of style for me. Just as my grandmother was once for me She infected me with love for this brand, it is the story of my grandmother's youth interwoven with war memories of her emigration and return to Poland with all her belongings locked in a Louis Vuitton trunk, which we found together in a dark corner of the basement as children. It has always been with me, later as a coffee table and a designer piece of equipment I still have it today. The same story also applies to my perfumes, these are the scents of childhood, one of them I will recreate my grandmother's favorite scent The essence of omnipotence is locked in a retro bottle It was my grandmother who told me that if I work hard, one day I will buy myself a Louis Vuitton bag. For years I have been a loyal collector of accessories of this brand, an ambassador and guest invited to special Louis Vuitton shows, I pose for photos with accessories of this brand, and I even appeared on the cover of Playboy I am currently focusing on my perfume brand „JustFetish by Joanne" In the future, I intend to continue designing home decoration accessories and interior design, which I have done before when decorating my hotels.

What's your future goals? I dream of a happy family and achieving my goals. I want to establish a Foundation for children with Tourette's syndrome. It's a cause close to my heart for certain reasons. My greatest dream is to complete a biography about my life. It was not a bed of roses with many tears and sacrifices It will include my memories & motivate people to never give up and have faith the sun always comes after the storm.

What is the most valuable lesson you've learned in your career as a model? One of the most important lessons I have learned in my life is to be true to myself This means not just in my personal life, but at work,

too. Quite a few people have challenged me over the years, saying that you can't run a business based on personal values. But I completely disagree. You need to identify the opportunity, act on it, and not give up until you have a solution. Try not to change under pressure from others, be yourself, be authentic and natural. My basic values are respect and loyalty. I treat others the way I would like to be treated.

What's the most valuable lesson you've learned in your career? In my career, I've had lots of moments when I feel I've achieved something and also lots of other moments when something has gone wrong. I've learned that it helps to use neither to define who you are or what you can achieve. There are days when you won't put in much effort and everything good will fall in your lap. There are other days when you will try your hardest and nothing will go right. That's just life. But it important is to always remember. Failure is a natural part of learning and an opportunity to grow. As I mentioned earlier. Even if stones land on your face every day, be strong and fight adversity, think positively. I am the best example that the impossible is possible. In moments of failure, don't waste time analyzing your mistakes. They are your lesson for a better future.

Who is your celebrity crush? I am a big fan of Lady Gaga because she's a multi-talented person as a singer and actress, dancer but she also has a very interesting character and her vision of looking at the world motivates and inspires. From the world of FHM, Playboy and this industry is definitely Pamela Anderson but also Anna Nicole Smith - many people tell me that I am supposedly similar to her haha. I recommend watching documentaries about their lives on Netflix. They are very inspiring.

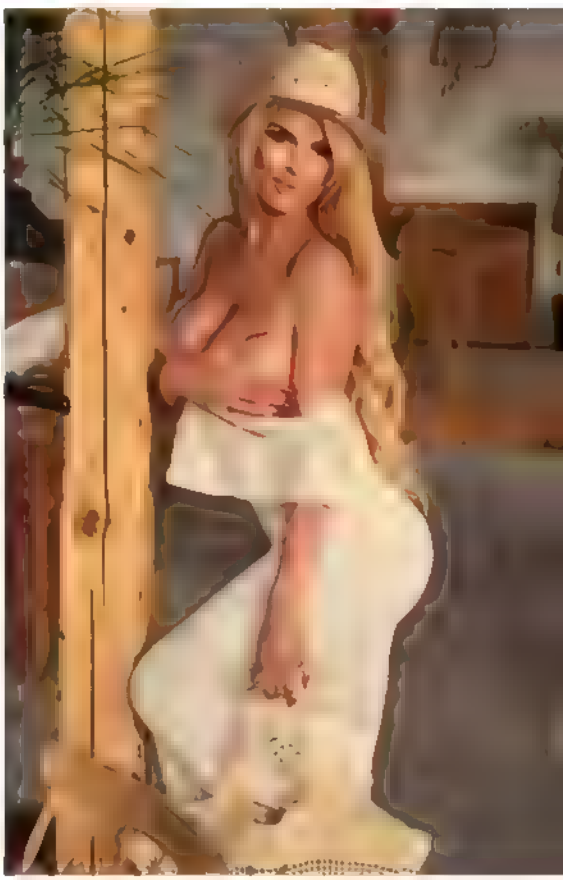
What is the absolute worst thing a man can do to completely put you off? The worst thing you can do to offend me is to treat anyone without respect. If you only respect the wealthy it's unsavoury and unacceptable to me. Men who decorate themselves with expensive methods will be valuable, but in fact, they are selfish, false, disloyal, and disrespectful to women. Wealth comes from within it cannot be bought with any amount of money. To win my heart, be a caring, good-natured boy, individual. You will love me for who I am, my character not what I have or don't have as a benefit for you. I only like the well-mannered gentleman who treats me like a lady and is old-fashioned with good manners. Thank you.

What has been your favorite project or collaboration to date? For sure Playboy. It all started with him. He opened the door to international fame, participated in many photo shoots and interviews for travel magazines meeting wonderful people. Founding a cosmetics brand, Playboy gave me wings. It's an unforgettable experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. Thank you for this wonderful gift from God. I never dreamt that one day I would be in Playboy, it's a blessing. It's like a fairy tale, how an ordinary girl from a small town in Poland, who had to overcome many hardships throughout her life, ends up on the cover of Playboy. My biggest dream has come true. The Playboy invitation has helped me believe in myself even more. It has given me a lot of hope and belief that everything is possible and the world is waiting for me. An unforgettable experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. Thank you.

What does a typical day in your life look like? When I wake up I squeeze fresh orange juice, I look through my mail, and I go to the park with my dog. Then when I come back I make my favorite coconut latte macchiato, tabouleh salad, definitely with pomegranate seeds and fresh mint. I put on my favorite music and that's my time for meditation. Then some yoga exercises a few deep breaths and I'm ready for the whole day. My daily routine includes photo shoots for magazines, interviews, make-up, hairdresser, beautician. I go to the factory where we create perfume scents in the laboratory. I'm just finishing work on my own line of make-up and candles and air fresheners for the home. Every day of mine is intense but I love it. When I have a lot of things to do I feel alive.

How do you stay motivated and focused in a fast-paced industry? From my experience, if you are very busy you don't focus on details but on organizational issues and I think this is the key to success. You just have to remember about healthy eating and the rest will take care of itself. When I am very busy and have a tight schedule I can find more free time than when I have a looser schedule it turns me into laziness and then I don't have time for anything.

What's your philosophy when it comes to balancing work and personal life? My philosophy on work-life balance is to prioritize intentionality and flexibility,



meaning actively managing my time to dedicate quality moments to both my professional commitments and personal well-being, understanding that the balance may shift depending on life circumstances, while always striving to maintain a healthy separation between the two spheres to avoid burnout.

What's one thing you do every day to keep yourself grounded and happy? Staying grounded means for me being able to stay calm and connect with my core self in the face of uncertainty. Practicing physical wellness. Exercise daily, eat nutritious food, and prioritize quality sleep, spend time in nature, connect with your senses, listen to music that reminds you of something positive. All of these little things are rituals that make you feel better even life sometimes can be hard and can be like balm for body and spirit. Repeating positive statements. Say kind statements to yourself, or repeat coping or safety statements.

What are some hobbies or passions you enjoy outside of work? I love helping others, this is the meaning of my life, especially for children with autism and Tourette's, Thanks to hard work, I managed to create my own cosmetic brand. I design my own perfume scents, and all this in order to establish a Foundation for children with Tourette's syndrome. It's a cause close to my heart for certain reasons. My greatest dream is to complete a biography about my life. It was not a bed of roses with many tears and sacrifices. It will include my memories and motivate people to never give up and have faith the sun always comes after the storm.

If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would it be and why? Modeling allows me to travel a lot, thanks to it I have visited many interesting places but there is still a lot to discover. I think that the place is not really of great importance but the people you are around, they create places. . You can be on a paradise beach alone with no one to talk to and enjoy the views together and then you have the impression that it doesn't matter where but with whom. You can be at home in front of the TV watching Netflix and have someone to cuddle up to - then you are in paradise. As I said earlier, places are created by people, not the other way around.

Which piece of clothing makes you feel confident and empowered when wearing it? I think that an elegant classic suit with my long red nails and red lipstick. I know what impression it makes on people lol. Generally, I wouldn't focus so much on the elements of clothing here, but my red nails, the color, length, and shape of which are the same, unchanging over the years, are the key elements of clothing that people often pay attention to. They are my characteristic distinguishing mark, hehe. I can even be in a tracksuit for a walk in the park and everyone always compliments my manicure, very often even women. I feel well-groomed and dressed when I have a perfect manicure.

What's your favorite guilty-pleasure snack or meal? Mmm.. frozen yogurt with fruit and pistachio sauce is divine. I go for long Nordick walks so I can eat what I want lol.

How do you unwind and recharge after a busy day? I take an aromatic candlelight bath accompanied by my favorite classical music, Macha tea, it's a real ritual for body and soul.

What message do you hope to convey through your work? As above before, by not judging people by their cover to support and help each other and not to be jealous and selfish. Every day try to be the best version of yourself and treat others how you would like to be treated. Be your natural self don't try to change under the pressure of others. Even if stones land on your face every day, be strong and fight adversity, think positively. I am the best example that the impossible is possible. Stay strong and believe in yourself and your dreams will come true. Thank you for spending this time getting to know me. Always sending you Love and best wishes, Crista. xx.

Playboy Interview
Charles Barkley

A candid conversation with the NBA's fast-breaking big mouth about the rising Suns, stardom, bedlam in Barcelona — and his big butt

INTERVIEW BY **TOM BOSWELL** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **STEVE CONWAY**

Charles Barkley is a human party. He lives in Hotel Barkley—that's what his wife, Maureen, calls their home. He answers the door himself, usually in a sweatsuit, holding a putter, inviting everybody to come inside to join in his favorite parlor game. What will I do next?

"I love to play basketball. I love to have fun. And I love to say what's on my mind," he says. Every day, he makes sure he hits the trifecta.

When you're in Barkley's presence, he dominates the horizon. From his shaved head to his wide grin or profound scowl, he's a one-man weather system, always moving fast and changing configuration, like a sky full of clouds. Will he let the sun shine through or cloud up and rain?

The power of the power forward's appeal is that, as much as any athlete in the world, this Phoenix Sun might do anything. And has. If it costs him $40,000 to speak his mind about a referee, he thinks nothing of it. If he feels that a teammate should be knocked down in practice to test his toughness, so be it. He once ordered his NBA coach to take a player out of the game. Of course, his nicknames for that coach and his assistant were p"Little Knucklehead" and "Big Knucklehead."

In Barcelona, the U.S. Olympic Committee begged him to tone down his comments so the whole world wouldn't end up hating both him and the U S After Barkley belted a skinny Angolan player, he quipped, p"The guy probably hadn't eaten in a few weeks." Instead of apologizing, Barkley told the USOC to stop acting jealous, he added that America should be proud of the Dream Team, since making war and playing basketball were what the United States does best For this, and more, he was called an ugly American. Yet Barkley spent more time in the outdoor cafés along Las Ramblas, hobnobbing with the common folks, than all the other Dreamers put together

He's been arrested and cleared on a gun charge, accidentally spit in a little girl's face, punched Bill Laimbeer (fine $20,000—you would think they'd have given him a reward) and spent four hours in jail after an altercation with a heckler He says he has a new plan for the next guy in a bar who calls him p"nigger" Provoke the bum into throwing the first punch so he can't be sued, then break the guy's face But not with his shooting hand

On the court, Barkley is equally unpredictable. Nobody can control him. He and 76ers teammate Rick Mahorn used to get ready to play by butting heads, but they did it without helmets He'll post up 7'1" David Robinson and score in his face, spinning, faking, leaping and, probably, dunking—something he's done more over the last three years than any other NBA player Or Barkley will run the break, dribble between his legs or pass behind his back And he loves to stick the trey, too Usually, he bricks it. Except in the last five minutes of a game

"Can't nobody on the planet guard me," he likes to say p"If I were seven feet tall, I'd be illegal in three states." Will anybody his size ever be so great a rebounder again? Barkley has an opinion. "Never be another Ever Ever"

A man who stands 6'4¾" tall, and whose muscular development is not radically different from dozens of other players, should not be able to play an inside power game for an undersized team and still be the only man in the NBA who is in the top five in both scoring and rebounding Others come to play Barkley comes to declare war. p"I beat on people, I intimidate people, I'll endure more pain than they will. That's a big part of my game," he says

Of pesky guards who try to undercut him to draw a charge, the 252-pound Barkley says, p"None of them has ever tried to do it twice. I punish them. I drive my knee into their chest I land on them Luckily, I've never actually hurt anybody But when they finally get up, they usually can't speak. Well, "actually, one little guard whispered, p'I won't do that again, Charles.'"

Barkley is a powder keg, as well as a 26-point, 13-rebound power forward He's a truth-teller as well as a court jester The roots of his humor, his anger, his ambition and his wisdom go back to the projects of Leeds, Alabama, where he was raised by his mother and grandmother Growing up fatherless, he was the man of the family He was always the one who picked up the family pieces, like when one of his younger brothers had a stroke after using cocaine Barkley's mother was a maid, but he swore from early childhood that he'd p"be somebody special"

And he was. At Auburn, given access to a training table and the phone number of an all-night pizza parlor, he gained 100 pounds and led the Southeastern Conference in rebounding all three years. Nicknamed the Round Mound of Rebound and Boy Gorge, he came to the NBA in 1984 as a curiosity and a project But he dropped 50 pounds and came under the tutelage of Julius Erving and Moses Malone, and he soon transformed himself into the Square Bear of Mid-Air Since arriving in the NBA, he has been the league's second leading offensive rebounder, averaged 23 5 points and made seven All-Star teams.

However, as a folk hero and lightning rod for controversy, Barkley has exploded in the past year. On the Dream Team, he outshone everyone, including Jordan, showing the world that basketball could be ferocious as well as stratospheric and balletic. Back in the U S , he discovered a second NBA life after a trade from the grouchy, moribund Philadelphia 76ers to the Suns. To get Barkley, the Suns gave what was widely considered a suicidal price—their 20 point All-Star shooting guard, their starting power forward and a 6'11" center who was one of the league's better shot blockers.

Would the Suns, who were 53-29 last season, become Charles and the four dwarfs? Hardly At midseason the Suns had the NBA's best record. With Barkley at various times playing each of the three front-court positions in the Suns' four-guards-and-Charles pressure defense, Phoenix has become the talk of the sport and a possible postseason favorite

To interview Barkley, PLAYBOY sent Tom Boswell, sportswriter and columnist for The Washington Post for 24 years, as well as an occasional profile writer for PLAYBOY Boswell reports

"Many superstar athletes like to hide or whine, especially those famous enough to take Godzilla to the rack Barkley, however, hides nothing. He's turned in-your-face into a lifestyle. He says what he wants. He invents his own code of conduct. And he invites you to inspect his whole life.

"Subjects for the Playboy Interview are legendary for being reclusive or difficult or self-important. To Barkley, it's just another kind of fun. He picks you up when you get off the train and plays chauffeur. He gets you another drink and asks which football game you want to watch while you talk in his den. You ask for 90 minutes, he

gives you three hours until you run out of tapes. You ask for another hour in another city and he gives you the whole day, takes you everywhere, even lets you hear the women propositioning him on his hotel voice-mail. When he finds out you have the same golf handicap, he wants to set up a game so he can beat you.

"You interview him while he's in the whirlpool. You interview him while he interviews Shaquille O'Neal. You interview between gigantic bites of greasy food. You interview him while his drop-dead-beautiful wife walks around in short shorts and heels. When you leave something behind at his house and ask the first taxi driver you meet to help you find Charles Barkley's house, the guy says, 'Everybody knows where Charles lives.' And he takes you right to the door.

"Most of all, this is how Barkley dispenses his worldview. You go to his hotel room before a night game in Orlando. You ask him everything you can print and a couple things you figure he shouldn't have told you, so you won't print them because they're nobody's business. He turns on his beloved soap operas. You help him make the bed and arrange everything in the room so it's in perfect order. The guy's a freak for order and you know he won't do anything until that bed is made.

"A knock on the door. Three tailors—two men, one woman, all young and hip and dressed to die—enter. They've flown a thousand miles for a fitting. Today, it's pants. They brief him on the style they'd like for him. 'I'll take six pairs,' he says. The tailors stay and join the interview.

"Another knock on the door. A tall, attractive masseuse enters. Barkley starts to strip. The woman tailor leaves. The guys stay. This they have to see. She joins a *Playboy Interview* that is about as large as the McLaughlin Group. She hands out her card and says she wishes to be identified as a massage therapist because she doesn't do that other stuff. She's rubbed some NBA legs, she says, but none like Barkley's. 'Charles' thighs are as big as Stanley Roberts',' she says of the L.A. Clippers' 7', 285-pound center. 'But Stanley's are like mush. Charles' legs are like rock.'

"The two tailors look at Barkley, look at the woman and exchange a glance that clearly says this man's life is one continuous possibility they can't even imagine.

"Slowly, Barkley puts on his game face. He wants to get mad at Shaquille O'Neal, but he can't. 'He's a nice kid. Polite, respectful, like I was when I came into the league. Not like Alonzo Mourning. I played him two nights ago. All he did was beat on me, kick my ass all night and motherfuck me to my face every time I tried to say something nice to him. He's got the worst attitude I ever saw in a rookie.'

"Barkley laughs wickedly. 'Alonzo's going to be great. I love his game.'

"In a few hours, Barkley must meet a different man in the paint. One who is eight inches taller, 50 pounds bigger and nine years younger than he. But Barkley expects to kick the Shaq's butt and lead his team to victory.

"You can look it up. He did."

Scene: Barkley's living room in an exclusive Philadelphia suburb. You enter his development through a security gate past an armed guard who sits in a stone turret. Barkley is in the final stages of preparation for his move to Phoenix. Boxes, many full and ready to ship, are everywhere. This disarray drives Barkley crazy. As he sits down for the interview, Barkley shouts to his wife, "Did any of my friends call to bet on the game today?" It was just a head fake.

PLAYBOY: Things are in a moving-day shambles here. How does it feel to be starting over?

BARKLEY: Well, there is some sadness. I've been here eight years. This is all I know. Now I'm going into the unknown.

PLAYBOY: You weren't exactly happy here, especially the past few years. Is there anything that you'll miss?

BARKLEY: The worst is missing your friends. People in the Sixers organization, people in the restaurants, the fans who see every game. Otherwise, the negatives aren't that bad. The only negative is losing. I played here for eight years and we lost only two years. Other than that, the eight years have been great.

PLAYBOY: Philly fans are pretty tough.

BARKLEY: Actually, they've always been good to me. If you go out and try hard, they're going to like you. If you don't, they don't. I worked hard and that endeared me to them.

PLAYBOY: You must have some regrets.

BARKLEY: It's hard sometimes. Last year guys were saying they would have done better than me if they got the ball as much as I did. Guys were saying I was holding them back.

PLAYBOY: Are we finding out the truth about that now? Look at the Sixers' record.

BARKLEY: Yeah, that frustrated me. Hersey Hawkins said I was holding him back. He was an All-Star with me. Armon Gilliam said he didn't get a chance to show his real game. I told him, "You've been on three teams. I wasn't on the other two teams, and they traded you." Nobody ever had a problem with my game until last year, and I blame the Sixers for that. The Sixers should have just come out and said, "Listen, Charles is the only player we have with any trade value, that's why we'll trade him," instead of saying that Charles is causing all these problems.

PLAYBOY: Did the fans here give Moses Malone his due? Nobody worked harder than Moses.

BARKLEY: I don't think he was ever loved. Because they're not as nice to guys who are their own individuals. They want you to stay in your place. That's unfair. We all have opinions and we're all individuals. Just because you say something doesn't make it controversial, and it doesn't make you a bad person. We're not all supposed to think alike. But they want you to stay in your place before they give you their full love.

PLAYBOY: Can we talk about Harold Katz, the owner of the Sixers?

BARKLEY: Oh, Jesus.

PLAYBOY: What do you think of the guy?

"We live in a dangerous society. People are so sick in this world. I feel safer with my gun."

BARKLEY: Well, he's just a great businessman. The biggest problem I have with him is that he treated everything as strictly business. There was no personal relationship with the players. If I were an owner I could see that. But as a player it wasn't right. Because we're not business. We're not property, we're not meat. We're people.

PLAYBOY: Katz' locker-room tirades were infamous. Was that destructive?

BARKLEY: Yeah. That's hard. You can't treat people like that. You can't shake somebody's hand if he wins and curse him out if he plays bad. That's too much of an emotional swing.

PLAYBOY: Do you rein yourself in for the press or the public?

BARKLEY: A lot of guys are different in private than they are in public. They say stuff to get reactions from the fans or the media. That's not my style. I don't have to lie, or say something and not really say anything. I don't think that's the way it should be done. You ask me a question, I'll tell you the truth. If you like my answer, that's great. If you don't, I'm still entitled to my opinion.

PLAYBOY: You have done things in moments of anger—such as the time you spit at a fan who was heckling you and hit a little girl instead—that seemed crazy or mean.

BARKLEY: Other than the spitting incident—I did apologize for that—I don't apologize for anything I've said or done. I'm always blunt. I feel that white people are treated better than blacks. I think the rich are treated better than the poor. And I think men are treated better than women. The press gets on my case a lot because I say stuff like that. But other than the spitting incident, I don't really think I've done anything wrong.

PLAYBOY: You've been a champion of fat people, too.

BARKLEY: That's true. People don't want to hear the truth. Fat people are discriminated against. That's just human nature. Stereotypes abound. Like all black people are hoodlums, all Jewish people are crooks. That's totally not true. What's even worse, it's considered all right that people think that way. Marge Schott can say g"money-grubbing Jews" or "million-dollar niggers," because that's the society we live in. People say it's freedom of speech. That's not freedom of speech. Any woman who has that much power isn't going to hire blacks or Jews. That ain't the worst part about it. The worst thing is that she may go and kiss up to them. When the Reds won the World Series, she was drinking champagne with the brothers and calling them million-dollar niggers behind their backs. I have more respect for the Klan, because when they call you nigger they don't sit there and drink with you.

PLAYBOY: In Leeds, Alabama, where you grew up, were people judged on their merits?

BARKLEY: No, you were judged on your race in Leeds. I have to give credit to my mother and grandmother and my best friend in the world, Joseph Mock. Those three people always kept my head level as far as race was concerned. My mother and grandmother said, g"Listen, all white people are not bad." They kept stressing that. A lot of white people helped us make it, because my mother and grandmother were maids.

PLAYBOY: But most people aren't as open-minded as your mother and grandmother.

BARKLEY: I blame the media for a lot of our problems. They don't usually tell the truth. They got the majority of white people thinking black people are bad, and they got the majority of black people thinking white people are bad. I don't believe that. The truth is, we're all the same. But the negative stuff sells papers and TV shows. Instead of always doing stories about who gets mugged and killed by somebody of the opposite race or saying that all black people are on welfare or all white people are in the Klan, they can be a little more realistic in their reporting.

PLAYBOY: You grew up in the Deep South, in the projects, but you went to a school that was mostly white. What was that like?

BARKLEY: It was good for me. It gave me a chance to experience more. The educational system was better at the white school. It gave me a chance to interact with nice white people. When you're a kid, you don't think racist. When you grow up, that's when you become racist. Some knucklehead teaches you to be racist. You can't look at all white people and say, g"I don't like them." You can't say, "Well, I like all blacks." There are black people I don't want to be around, and there are white people I don't want to be around.

> "I don't enjoy all the attention. I don't really enjoy being 'Charles Barkley.'"

PLAYBOY: Do you think people cry racism when they can't get the job done on their own?

BARKLEY: A lot of people use racism as a crutch. I'd be the first to admit that a lot of black people use that for their failures. No white person in this world can stop me from being successful if I want to be successful. I believe that. No black person could stop me from being successful, either. I don't think it's fair to blame all black America's problems on white America. Because we do a lot of stuff to ourselves. I saw a very disturbing statistic. More than seventy percent of crimes against black people are committed by other black people.

PLAYBOY: Is there any way around that frustration?

BARKLEY: It doesn't help to get mad at the world. I'm not ever going to be jealous of somebody else's success. If a black person wants to open up a business, he can. I don't think it's fair to get mad at people from another culture for being successful in your culture. We have that same opportunity. If we were going to put in something, we should have put it there before.

PLAYBOY: And how do you handle racial slurs?

BARKLEY: I can't take them.

PLAYBOY: Does that make you a target for anybody who is obnoxious enough?

BARKLEY: No, that's just going to make my right hand sore from hitting people. I don't mind. I just have to get better at provoking them. I've got to make them hit me first, so they can't sue me. They don't pay me enough money to let people call me any name in the book.

PLAYBOY: When I was reading up on you, the thing that worried

me was that you have a gun in your car. Are you the kind of person who should carry a gun?

BARKLEY: Let me ask you a question. I've had my gun in my car for, let's see, nine years. You've heard about it only once. If I was a maniac or a crazy person, don't you think you would have heard about it more than once?

PLAYBOY: It's argued that your chances of getting killed with your own gun are much greater than your chances of getting killed with anybody else's gun.

BARKLEY: We live in a dangerous society. People are so sick in this world. With the car jacking going on, I feel safer with my gun. People know I'm Charles Barkley and I'm going to have money on me. I'm not the statistic. What about the statistics that say some small kid from Alabama isn't going to make it to the NBA? You can't compare yourself to a statistic. You have to be better than a statistic.

PLAYBOY: The stats say you're more likely to be killed with your own gun by accident, or in a domestic argument or by your kid, who doesn't know what he's playing with, than by an intruder. People get depressed and kill themselves.

BARKLEY: I won't kill myself. I'm one of my favorite people.

PLAYBOY: When people draw you into fights with racial slurs, are they doing it so they can sue you?

BARKLEY: No, people use those words because they're racist. That's what they've been taught. We're taught racism in this country. I have to stand up for myself. I didn't get where I am now by backing down and letting things stop me.

PLAYBOY: On occasion, you've been accused of being racist. Remember the Dave Hoppen incident last season?

BARKLEY: The Sixers were down to fourteen or fifteen players in training camp and somebody asked me, g"Do you think they'll cut Dave Hoppen?" I said, "I don't know. But if they cut Dave Hoppen, some people will be upset because we'll have an all-black team." End of quotation. Well, in no way did I say Dave Hoppen was on the team only because he was white. Or a token. I was really offended by the way the media made me out to be a racist. Because, as a black person, I am never going to be a racist. I know how it feels to be treated that way. I will never treat another person that way. Never.

PLAYBOY: You hold your opinions strongly. Do you fall into the trap of thinking that everything you believe is absolute truth?

BARKLEY: Well, as far as racism and sexism go, I'm flat-out right. There's no in-between. I'm not fooling myself that I'm the smartest person in the world. But on those two things I am a hundred percent positive that I am right. I think the majority of people in the world will agree with me. My opinions are just as important as everybody else's.

PLAYBOY: People are fascinated by public figures who say what they think.

BARKLEY: It is more important to talk about things like that than it is to play basketball. That stuff is a lot more significant than going out and getting twenty points.

PLAYBOY: There are some quotes that live on. After Bobby Knight left you off the 1984 Olympic team, you said, g"I hate the son of a bitch." Do you still feel that way?

BARKLEY: No, not at all. I love Bobby Knight. I like the way he coaches. But, honestly, has he done things wrong? Yes. Have I done things wrong? Yes. But, on the whole, the guy is a great basketball coach. I didn't deserve to make that Olympic team. I didn't want to and didn't care about it.

PLAYBOY: Does it bother you that that's one quote you're remembered for?

BARKLEY: You know, with most of the stuff I've said, I was just trying to have fun. Everybody laughs, and then they put it in the paper and it doesn't sound funny. That's one thing that makes me mad about the media. The reporters know you're joking, and then they print it. The night I said, g"That's the kind of game that makes you want to go home and beat your wife and kids," everybody started laughing. When I read it in the paper the next day, I could see why people were offended by it. I don't think of myself as giving interviews. I just have conversations. That gets me in trouble.

PLAYBOY: At the Olympics you said a couple of things I wondered if you wanted to take back, such as America's being best at basketball and the military.

BARKLEY: No, I'm right about the military. We should have the best military. We should have the best of everything. I'm for America. I don't like foreigners thinking they're better than we are. That's what we talked about in our team meetings. We wanted to prove we were the best basketball players in the world, and we did.

PLAYBOY: You also said that Herlander Coimbra, the player from Angola you elbowed during the Olympics, probably hadn't eaten in a few weeks.

BARKLEY: I was just having fun.

Scene: The months pass, and Barkley is stomping through the league with his Phoenix Suns, who, as we went to press, sport the best record in the NBA. This just might be Barkley's MVP season. He is sitting in a whirlpool in the Orlando Magic locker room, having just interviewed Shaquille O'Neal for Barkley's Phoenix TV show. Of Shaq, he says, "He's not as tall as I thought. But he's so wide. That's better than tall. He's as thick as me. Imagine me, but seven feet tall." Being in a locker room with Barkley is like being in a Vegas casino with Don Rickles. He is the self-appointed master of ceremonies in his world. He tries to trade four of his teammates to the Magic GM for Shaq. He exchanges scouting reports (anywhere else, this would be called gossip) with Magic coach Matt Guokas. He listens to Guokas' son tell about his college career and the Magic's Terry Catledge explain his latest injury. Barkley is interested in everybody else's life story and doesn't hog the floor with his own business. Everyone who comes into the room and discovers Barkley lights up as if it's Christmas morning and they just discovered Santa Claus in their living room, still eating his milk and cookies. Nobody leaves quickly. Typically, Barkley finds it natural to give an interview while taking a whirlpool and holding court with anyone who passes by.

PLAYBOY: A few years ago you said, "As long as Bird is around I will only be the second-worst defensive player in basketball."

BARKLEY: Larry's one of the greatest players ever to play the game, and that was just some joking around. But yeah, that's probably the most disappointing part of my game.

PLAYBOY: Do you pick your moments to turn up the defensive intensity?

BARKLEY: I can play defense with anybody in the last five minutes of the game.

PLAYBOY: You crash the boards, and that's a big part of defense.

BARKLEY: Yeah. The most important stat to me is rebounding. If you shoot the ball enough, you can average twenty points a game. I'd rather get twenty rebounds than score twenty points.

PLAYBOY: Conventional wisdom says you have to box out to get rebounds. Do you agree?

BARKLEY: No, I don't. It's hard to box out guys if they are good rebounders. If you're going to stand there and hold them, you're not going toward the ball. Somebody will beat you to it.

PLAYBOY: How many guys can get away with that?

BARKLEY: Not many, but there aren't many good rebounders. No, excuse me, there aren't many great rebounders.

PLAYBOY: Who are the great rebounders?

BARKLEY: Dennis Rodman, Charles Oakley, Hakeem Olajuwon. Those are the guys I respect the most.

PLAYBOY: Do they mostly block out or do they go for the ball?

BARKLEY: Dennis is the best at just going to the ball. Charles Oakley gets more out of less jumping ability than any player out there, but he doesn't jump. He boxes out. Hakeem gets them on talent and quickness.

PLAYBOY: You'll probably be remembered longest as a relatively short guy who is the second-best offensive rebounder in the game. How can you be that much better than people who are that much bigger?

BARKLEY: Number one, God gave me a lot of talent. Number two, I just want to rebound. It's all desire.

PLAYBOY: What's the best part of your game?

BARKLEY: My competitiveness.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about dunks. Over a three-year period, you had more than five hundred dunks. More than Michael Jordan. More than anybody. Why are you the league's leading dunker?

BARKLEY: Because I'm so short. I don't like laying it up because it can get blocked. Get it in the rim, I dunk because it's the easiest shot.

PLAYBOY: Robert Parish once said that being hit by you was like being crunched in a trash compactor.

BARKLEY: I did bang him. My philosophy is simple. I want to bang, bang, bang for forty-eight minutes. I want to bang you and try to outplay you the last three minutes of the game. I'm betting that you're going to wear down. If I start banging you in the first quarter, I think you're going to get tired before me.

PLAYBOY: When you talk about banging, what's the most important part of your body? Hips, elbows or legs?

BARKLEY: Leg strength is so important when you're trying to get position. Using your ass is important. I have really big thighs. My legs are huge. That's why I can't buy pants. I used to wear size thirty-six pants, but because my thighs are so big, I have to get forty-twos and have the waist taken in to make up for the difference. All my strength comes from my lower body.

PLAYBOY: You once said that the game is slower for you in the final minutes. Wayne Gretzky, Larry Bird and other athletes say the same thing.

BARKLEY: Jerry West said that if you're a great player, the game's in slow motion. If you can play the game, it is easy. I really believe it. For me, this is probably the first year in my life that I've really had to work and do all the other things to be good.

PLAYBOY: You mean weight lifting?

BARKLEY: Weight lifting, running. I used to take running for granted. Now I can feel myself running. It's a struggle for me to run. I'm forcing myself to run hard. I guess I'm starting to get old. I used to go to the gym and play. Now I have to get there a little bit early, do a lot of stretching and things like that.

PLAYBOY: Who is the best player you've ever played against?

BARKLEY: Kevin McHale, bar none. You had to hope he was missing. You couldn't stop him. In his prime he was the best. He was too big for me and everybody on him, whether it was Moses or Bobby Jones. That Celtics front line was the greatest front line ever to play the game. There were no weaknesses.

PLAYBOY: Do you like to be the center of attention?

BARKLEY: I don't enjoy all the attention. I don't really enjoy being g"Charles Barkley." I just try to have fun in whatever I do. If it were up to me, I would just play basketball and walk around anonymously. But I want to have fun. I don't try to get attention by doing things or saying things. I just try to be honest and make sure I enjoy this. These are the quality years of my life. I've spent all my adulthood being a star. If I'm miserable and don't enjoy it, that's wrong. I'm not going to spend twenty to thirty years in this position, so I'm going to enjoy the hell out of it while I'm here.

> "No white person in this world can stop me from being successful if I want to be successful."

PLAYBOY: Does that extend to the basketball court during games?

BARKLEY: That makes the game easier for me, because I'm always relaxed. Talking to the fans and cheerleaders relieves the tension.

PLAYBOY: Lee Trevino said the same thing about playing golf. He said if he couldn't talk he couldn't play.

BARKLEY: I would be so uptight. I wouldn't have anything to do but think about a pressing situation.

PLAYBOY: You have a reputation as one of the premiere trash talkers in the league.

BARKLEY: That stuff is overrated. I just have fun. When the guys start talking trash, I'm just talking. I don't look at it as talking trash.

PLAYBOY: Does it ever hurt your game?

BARKLEY: Sometimes talking trash makes you play better. You want to back up the trash you're talking. You think, I've said it. Now I have to do it.

PLAYBOY: If you were talking trash to Larry Bird or Chuck Person, what would you say? Most people think it would be, I'm going to kill you because I hate you. But it's lighter than that, isn't it?

BARKLEY: All they say is that you can't stop them. Sometimes you tell guys what you're going to do, then you do it.

PLAYBOY: Does anybody take it too personally?

BARKLEY: When you play against a guy who can't handle it, he gets all personal.

PLAYBOY: There's a classic piece of trash talking between you and Chuck Person. You told your teammates to isolate you on him. You said, g"Let me torture him."

BARKLEY: Chuck talks more than any other player in the NBA. If you don't play well against him, he lets you know it.

PLAYBOY: When you're torturing somebody, how do you feel?

BARKLEY: When I get twenty points in a half, sometimes I feel bad. I like playing against good players because it's a challenge to me. I don't like playing against bad players who you can kill all night.

PLAYBOY: Did it hurt you when they called you Food World in college?

BARKLEY: It didn't make me feel bad, like it does fat people. I understood that they were trying to get Auburn's basketball program on the map and they wanted to use me to attract attention. The only thing that annoyed me was that they weren't giving me enough credit as a basketball player. I was leading the SEC in rebounding.

PLAYBOY: What about when they sent pizzas to the bench?

BARKLEY: You know what? I don't get upset about stuff like that. I have a great sense of humor.

PLAYBOY: Even when they called you the Crisco Kid?

BARKLEY: I don't worry about what they call me. I worry about playing ball well. I may be whatever they call me, but I am one of only two guys who led the SEC in rebounding three years in a row. The other guy played before they had sneakers. [While at LSU, Shaquille O'Neal became the third player to reach this record. — Ed.]

PLAYBOY: Did you feel like a fat kid when you were growing up?

BARKLEY: No, because I didn't get fat until I went to college.

PLAYBOY: How did it happen?

BARKLEY: They served dinner too early. We practiced from three to six. They served dinner from six to seven, but I had been running down the court for three hours. You don't feel like eating right away. The guys on the team usually slept through dinner, or we were just too tired to rush back to eat. So we ordered pizza. My freshman year, I would say out of two hundred days, I probably ordered pizza late at night one hundred sixty times. That won't do you any good.

"Using your ass is important. I have really big thighs. That's why I can't buy pants."

Scene: Barkley sits in a hotel lobby, waiting for his old friend Buzzy Braman—former shooting coach for the 76ers who now holds that position with the Magic—to go to lunch with us. On the short walk from the Magic's arena to the Suns' hotel, Barkley has signed 50 autographs. Every attractive woman does or says something that, if the roles were reversed, would constitute sexual harassment. Barkley is polite but never reacts. When he gets his messages, one is from a woman who has found a way to proposition him on his hotel voice-mail. Braman arrives in a tiny, old, beat-up car that looks like it escaped from a Sixties college campus. Barkley offers to sit in the cramped backseat. When he gets in the front instead, he pulls the seat all the way forward and says, "Got enough room back there?" His knees are close to his chin. Braman takes Barkley to his health club to show him off to his friends. Barkley's "lunch" is 90 minutes of constant interruption, requests for photos and congratulations. At this greasy spoon joint, he has an enormous deli-style sandwich with fried egg sticking out every side. He praises the food. He smiles for every group photo, even for one woman who can't figure out her own camera. Braman is in heaven. Barkley enjoys Braman's obvious pleasure.

PLAYBOY: You were saying, while we were walking over here, that you didn't have much freedom in public. Make that no freedom in public.

BARKLEY: That's probably the hardest part of it: not being able to do things like a regular person. I am a normal person, except when I'm playing ball.

PLAYBOY: Do you turn down your metabolism in public?

BARKLEY: Yeah, I can't respond to people all the time. You have to keep your distance. Everybody wants a piece of you.

PLAYBOY: All sorts of people ask you for your autograph. I would think you'd see a lot of lost souls. Does it depress you?

BARKLEY: The only thing that depresses me is that most of the people are selling autographs now. It's not the good old days when they just asked for them if they respected your ability. Now they do it as a business venture.

PLAYBOY: You criticized Harold Katz on that front as well. Is the Phoenix front office different?

BARKLEY: I have never even seen the Suns' owner, Jerry Colangelo, in the locker room.

PLAYBOY: Does that cause less tension?

BARKLEY: Yes. If the organization really likes the players, they will play harder for that organization. They will come back from injuries sooner and try a little harder.

PLAYBOY: How good is the Suns team you're with now?

BARKLEY: We're not the best team in the league, but we're one of them. If we play well we can beat anybody.

PLAYBOY: Can you see down the road, within a year or two, when you might be able to say the Suns are the best team?

BARKLEY: I don't know if we will ever have the best team. We have some weaknesses. We have a small team.

PLAYBOY: There was a story at the beginning of training camp about your putting a big hit on Kevin Johnson. Do you test your teammates?

BARKLEY: I always test my teammates. You don't want to go eighty-two games without knowing what to expect from them when it gets to crunch time.

PLAYBOY: People have often said you're critical of teammates. There was the time you motioned to coach Jimmy Lynam to take Mike Gminski out of the game when he wasn't playing well.

BARKLEY: Mike Gminski and I played together for three seasons. He was having a bad game one day and I got frustrated and I told the coach to take him out. We were together for two and a half years and that's the only thing that people can remember.

PLAYBOY: Today, the first person you asked about was Gminski.

BARKLEY: Everybody will always try to make a big deal out of that. Let me tell you something. Danny Ainge screamed at me the other night on the court. That's one thing about our team. We don't get upset when somebody says something. But that's hard to explain to the public. Players are so fucking spoiled now. When I first went to Philadelphia, we screamed at one another and that made us play better. Dennis Johnson said when he was on the Celtics they yelled and that made them play better. We do the same thing in Phoenix, but we don't take it personally. We don't whine to the media. We don't whine to the coach. That's the difference between a good team and a bad team.

PLAYBOY: Why is there less whining with the Suns?

BARKLEY: Because the players are not insecure. They probably think, Charles is that good and he's going to get a lot of publicity. We're not jealous of him and that's just the way it is. When I went to Philadelphia, I was not jealous of Doc and Moses. Look at Chicago. I don't think those guys are jealous of Michael and Scottie. They just want to win. You have to sacrifice a little bit of yourself.

PLAYBOY: You continue to have problems with referees and fines—more than $140,000 in fines in the past few years.

BARKLEY: I'm just giving my money to charity.

PLAYBOY: Are the referees in the NBA that bad?

BARKLEY: No, not in general. But some of them get intimidated on the road.

PLAYBOY: So you intimidate them back?

BARKLEY: [*Laughs.*]

PLAYBOY: You and Mike Mathis don't get along. He threw you out of a game a few years ago.

BARKLEY: I hate him and he hates me. It's definitely personal between us.

PLAYBOY: Can you guys work out the problem?

BARKLEY: Never, never, ever.

PLAYBOY: Have you asked the league to take him off your games?

BARKLEY: I don't want to think about it.

PLAYBOY: What if you saw him working the seventh game of the NBA finals?

BARKLEY: I don't want to see him there.

PLAYBOY: Do you have the qualities to lead a team to the championship?

BARKLEY: You have to have the talent. No matter how good Michael Jordan is, he needed Pippen. They couldn't win because they didn't have enough players. I just met Dave Winfield. Think about all he's accomplished. He said he was finally on a team that was good enough to win. That's what it comes down to. I'd be a fool to walk up to Dan Marino and say, g"Hey, you haven't won a Super Bowl, you're a loser." You should never let a sporting event dictate your self-worth. If this team plays well, we could win it. If we don't, there were teams that were better than us.

PLAYBOY: Do you think there are players in the NBA who raise their teammates' level of play? Like Magic and Bird?

BARKLEY: I always think about that. That stuff is kind of overrated. Look at the players they're playing with. Kevin McHale is going to be a hell of a player regardless. Robert Parish was going to be a hell of a player regardless. Dennis Johnson was a hell of a player. Danny Ainge has always been a hell of a player. James Worthy—hell of a basketball player. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Scott Cooper. I had Charles Shackleford. You can't compare Charles Shackleford with Robert Parish or Kareem. You can't compare Armon Gilliam with James Worthy. That's a little unfair.

PLAYBOY: Bird and Magic raised their teammates with their great passing. Do you raise your teammates with your emotional level?

BARKLEY: Coach Westphal thinks I inspire the team by my attitude. My attitude is simple. I go out there and play as hard as I can for forty minutes. My emotion has helped me most of the time. Magic Johnson has a word he always uses: manpower. He says it all comes back to manpower. If you have enough manpower and things go your way, you're going to win it.

> "Anybody who has sex without using a condom is out of his mind."

PLAYBOY: How do the fans in Phoenix take to your flamboyant style of play?

BARKLEY: I don't worry about who likes or dislikes me. I know what it takes for me to be successful. I've been successful for eleven years.

PLAYBOY: Do people like you in Phoenix?

BARKLEY: They have been unbelievable to me. But I was never treated badly by the fans in Philly. Never.

PLAYBOY: Arizona gets something of a rap on racial issues.

BARKLEY: The city of Phoenix had the Martin Luther King holiday before the state. That's all I can say on that.

PLAYBOY: I saw you partying along Las Rambias when you were at the Olympics. Do you hate to sit around?

BARKLEY: I love sitting around, but I was at the Olympics. I'm not going to spend two of the greatest weeks of my life sitting in my damn room like a moron. That was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Because there was never anything like the Dream Team. There never will be again.

PLAYBOY: A lot of people don't understand that. Even though you knew you were going to kill everybody, it was still special.

BARKLEY: It was really special. Let me tell you something, I'm getting sick of hearing how bad the other teams were. It wasn't that the other teams were bad. It was that our team was just so awesome. It's kind of like having a Rolls-Royce every day of your life and never having to drive a Chevette.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel lucky that you came along at the right time to be at your peak on that team, before Bird and Magic disappeared, and while some young guys like David Robinson were starting to blossom? That might be the all-time team.

BARKLEY: It was the all-time team in any sport, ever. Magic played well, Larry didn't play as well as he was capable of because of his back. But you still had Michael and Scottie. You just can't put together a team that good in any sport. I was honored to be selected.

PLAYBOY: Can you talk about the teamwork or chemistry?

BARKLEY: There's no such thing as that. See, it's simple. If you can play, you can play. Good players just want to win and that's all we were concerned with. Bad, insecure players cause teams problems. Bad players worry about how much they score, because they're not getting minutes. But on that team, because all of us were so good, we just let it happen.

PLAYBOY: They divided up the minutes pretty evenly so nobody really had to worry about that.

BARKLEY: If we had lost, guys would have been bitching. If you're a good player and you're on that team, you're only concerned about winning.

PLAYBOY: How did you feel about the controversy surrounding Magic Johnson's second retirement?

BARKLEY: I feel bad about all the pressure Magic has been under. I think he should be playing.

PLAYBOY: What did you think about the people who were afraid they might have caught AIDS by playing against him?

BARKLEY: They're entitled to that opinion. It's not fair for us to tell them they're wrong. The medical opinion says there's a small chance. Well, who are we to tell those guys they should take that small chance? Everybody said there's a remote chance you can get bitten by a snake if you walk through the desert. Well, you don't have to walk through the desert.

PLAYBOY: Have guys around the league changed their sex lives because of AIDS?

BARKLEY: Yeah. If the situation with Magic Johnson didn't make you change, there's something wrong with you.

PLAYBOY: You don't think guys are backsliding now?

BARKLEY: No. Magic has helped so many people understand sexual activity. Anybody who has sex without using a condom is out of his mind.

PLAYBOY: If you were infected with HIV, would you go public after seeing what happened to Magic and Arthur Ashe?

Barkley: We're so ignorant in our society. We treat people with AIDS terribly. I would probably retire and spend every day with my daughter.

PLAYBOY: Has being a parent changed you in any way? Have you found out anything about yourself since Christiana was born?

BARKLEY: It lets you know that there's nothing more important than your kids.

PLAYBOY: Are you good at the obnoxious parts of being a parent—the diaper changes, the midnight feedings?

BARKLEY: No. I'd rather go out and run five miles and make more money and hire a nanny. Every time I think about changing a diaper, I run a little bit harder and a little bit faster to make sure I can afford a nanny until Christiana's old enough to take care of that herself.

PLAYBOY: Are you a good playing daddy? Do you like to play the board games and blocks and stuff like that?

BARKLEY: Not yet. I'm looking forward to retiring. Right now, my whole life is based on making things better for my family, so I'm not good about being a father. I'm trying to make money and set myself up for the future. We can have fun like a regular family once I'm retired. That's why women are important. They are better parents than men are because they are willing to do those obnoxious little things. They get up in the night.

PLAYBOY: What's the best part about being a dad?

BARKLEY: When she's kissing me every five minutes and telling me she loves me, or when we go shopping and she's just happy. When my daughter is playing with her toys, and then running back to show me, that's what makes me feel like everything I've done is worth it. If I die tomorrow, my daughter wouldn't have to marry some bum who beats her just because they have kids and don't have any money. My daughter won't ever be in that situation. It makes me think all the bad experiences were worth it.

PLAYBOY: Okay, here's a news flash: Charles Barkley appointed commissioner of the NBA. What would you do?

BARKLEY: I would drug-test everybody. I would put somebody in charge of helping the inner city because we don't do enough for the inner city. I would be a little more stringent with the fans because some of them just go to games to harass, and that's not right. When they use profanity toward you or your family, they cross the line. The NBA doesn't really have any balls. It's concerned only about money. It's like, well, the fans pay their money, so they can say and do what they want. That's not right.

PLAYBOY: Both Isiah Thomas and Michael Jordan have been involved in gambling controversies. You had a flap about making a bet with Mark Jackson.

BARKLEY: Michael Jordan was treated unfairly. What Michael Jordan does with his money is his business. I think the NBA was totally wrong. He can do whatever he wants to do with his money. If he wants to play golf with it, that's fine. And if he's going to keep playing golf like he was playing that weekend, I want to play him, too.

PLAYBOY: How about the people he was playing with?

BARKLEY: In fairness to Michael, he did not know that guy. When he goes home for the summer, he's not going to assume his friends will be hanging out with drug dealers and put him in that situation. I blame his friends more than I blame him. Obviously, Michael Jordan ain't going to play with no cocaine dealer. But if I go to Leeds during the summer, I don't expect my friends to have a drug dealer as one of the guys in our foursome.

PLAYBOY: Portland's Clyde Drexler once said, "Whatever Charles wants, Charles gets." Is it too easy for you now?

BARKLEY: Nobody gives me anything. Everything I get I earn. I don't want that much from other people. There ain't nothing easy and there ain't nothing free. That's the only rule I know.

PLAYBOY: Is that a lesson for black kids?

BARKLEY: As a black person growing up in this country you have to realize that's a strike against you. So you're going to have to work a little harder. And if you want an excuse, you've got an excuse. The white man can't stop me from being successful if I want it bad enough. That's a phrase you hear tossed around by blacks sometimes.

PLAYBOY: That whites can stop you?

BARKLEY: Yeah. The white man won't let me be successful. I say that's bull. Nobody could stop me from being successful, and that's the way you have to approach life.

PLAYBOY: You don't think that your physical talent is a big part of your success? What if you had less talent?

BARKLEY: There are a lot of players who have talent who never make it.

PLAYBOY: But you feel that you could have made it, even without your athletic talent?

BARKLEY: I would have made it at something. I'm too determined. I made up my mind a long time ago I was going to be successful at something.

PLAYBOY: You were not a particularly good athlete growing up,

even after you said you were going to be in the NBA. You didn't make the high school team the first time you tried out.

BARKLEY: I was just joking around then. I was using basketball to go to college for free. That's the only reason I started playing ball. I never expected to be where I am today. But there was no doubt in my mind I was going to be a success.

PLAYBOY: You said from an early age that you were going to do something special.

BARKLEY: I don't want to be like everybody else.

PLAYBOY: Most people do.

BARKLEY: I know. I don't. Seriously. Nobody wants to shoot in the last two or three minutes of a game. I do. Somebody has to be the hero. It might as well be me.

PLAYBOY: Is it possible that the two special gifts you were given were basketball and the ability to make people around you have a good time?

BARKLEY: Yeah, I believe that.

PLAYBOY: And that the second one sometimes gets misinterpreted and people think, Well, he's a show-off or he wants attention?

BARKLEY: Yeah. There's no doubt in my mind. Because I am Charles Barkley, I'm going to get the attention. I just want people around me to enjoy what I'm experiencing. I've lived a dream. I've done more in my life than people who will live to be a hundred are going to do. I'm thirty years old and I've been all over the world, played with Dr. J, played against Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, got to meet all kinds of people. I got a chance to give people money who didn't have money, to make them smile, to visit kids in the hospital. Hey, I've had an incredible life. If it ended tomorrow, I'd still be, like, wow.

PLAYBOY: Are you ever impressed with what you've accomplished?

BARKLEY: I think it's kind of amazing. My wife said to me the other day, g"Are you ever in awe of yourself?" And that made me think. Life goes by so fast that you don't have time to be in awe of yourself. I know I can go out there and score a hundred points. But tomorrow night some guy could lock me up and kick my ass and it would be like I ain't done nothing. You're only remembered for your last game. That's the sad thing about it.

PLAYBOY: Ten years from now, will you miss all the action?

BARKLEY: No. I can accept getting old. There are people who say I'm not going to want to retire in three years. I don't believe that. You have to be a man about everything that happens in your life. When I make a mistake, I don't lie, bitch or complain. I take the heat and move on. You won't see me out there struggling to play. They won't have to tear my uniform off me. You won't see me going overseas to play. I think you just have to say, g"Hey, I had a great career and I can't do it anymore."

PLAYBOY: Your threshold of pain is a legend. Is that willpower, or do you think you actually feel pain less?

BARKLEY: A combination of both. Athletes have to play in pain. If you sit out every time you're in pain, you can't play professional sports.

PLAYBOY: Are you worried that your injuries will stick with you the rest of your life?

BARKLEY: I realize that when I'm in my late forties and fifties I won't be able to walk. But I won't have to work until I'm sixty-five, like most people do. To me it's worth it. I see my grandmother's new house or visit my mother in her new house and ride in her new Lexus. When I signed my first contract, I bought my mother an Oldsmobile. For Christmas three or four years later, I bought her a Mercedes. Every time I think about how bad some part of my body hurts, I think about that. You can't describe what that is like.

PLAYBOY: We'll have to come back in twenty years and ask you about the pain.

BARKLEY: You know what? There's no greater pain to me than being poor. I've been poor and now I have money. That's pain: being poor and struggling all the time to make ends meet. Seeing something that you want and can't have, to me that's serious pain.

PLAYBOY: When your basketball career is over, how do you think you will be remembered?

BARKLEY: People will say, g"When I paid my fifty bucks to see Charles Barkley play, he played as hard as he could." That's the only thing I expect. When I lace up them Nikes, I play as hard as I can no matter what is happening around me. I don't dog it. I play.

Sir Charles telephones from Los Angeles, where two days before he has attended his first Super Bowl. He declares the spectacle m"awesome" and the game itself "awful." He skipped all the fancy parties—like Magic's bash at the Palace. Barkley says, "I just came for the game. Sat with Jeffrey Osbourne. Had a ball."

PLAYBOY: When we first talked before the season, you said that the Suns were not the best team in the NBA, but you thought that you would have a fighting chance to beat anybody in the playoffs. It's past midseason and the Suns have the best record in the league. What do you think about your chances now?

BARKLEY: Things have worked out better than anybody could have imagined. It's been incredible how well we've come along. I thought our lack of height and defense would hurt us. But we've played taller and bigger than I thought we would, and we've played great defense when it has really mattered. We're a finesse team. But so far, the punchers haven't been able to catch up with the boxers.

PLAYBOY: Have your new teammates surprised you?

BARKLEY: Before I got here, everybody told me this team was soft. Not true. I knew that Danny Ainge, Dan Majerle and Kevin Johnson were outstanding players, but I didn't know just how good they really were. Majerle is just as tough as I am. There are not many players in the league that tough. But he is. Ainge wants to win just as bad as I do. Same goes for KJ. When he doesn't play well or somebody else doesn't play well, Kevin gets really ticked off. He gets on himself. He gets on them. I like that. Tom Chambers has been an inspiration to me the way he's handled a tough situation. Here's a guy who has scored more points in the NBA than I have and he's accepted playing less minutes for the good of the team. I really respect him. He's made me think that, when the time comes for me, maybe I could handle it, too.

PLAYBOY: What about Richard Dumas? He's the talk of the league this season—a rookie coming off a drug problem who's the second-highest scorer on the winningest team.

BARKLEY: He's a nice, quiet kid. He reminds me of a small-town guy. I don't think he understands the magnitude of his ability. He has spectacular talent, and right now he's playing on talent. He can get by with that. But once he learns the fine points of the game, he'll get to the next level.

PLAYBOY: What's the general attitude on the Suns, compared to your last couple years in Philadelphia?

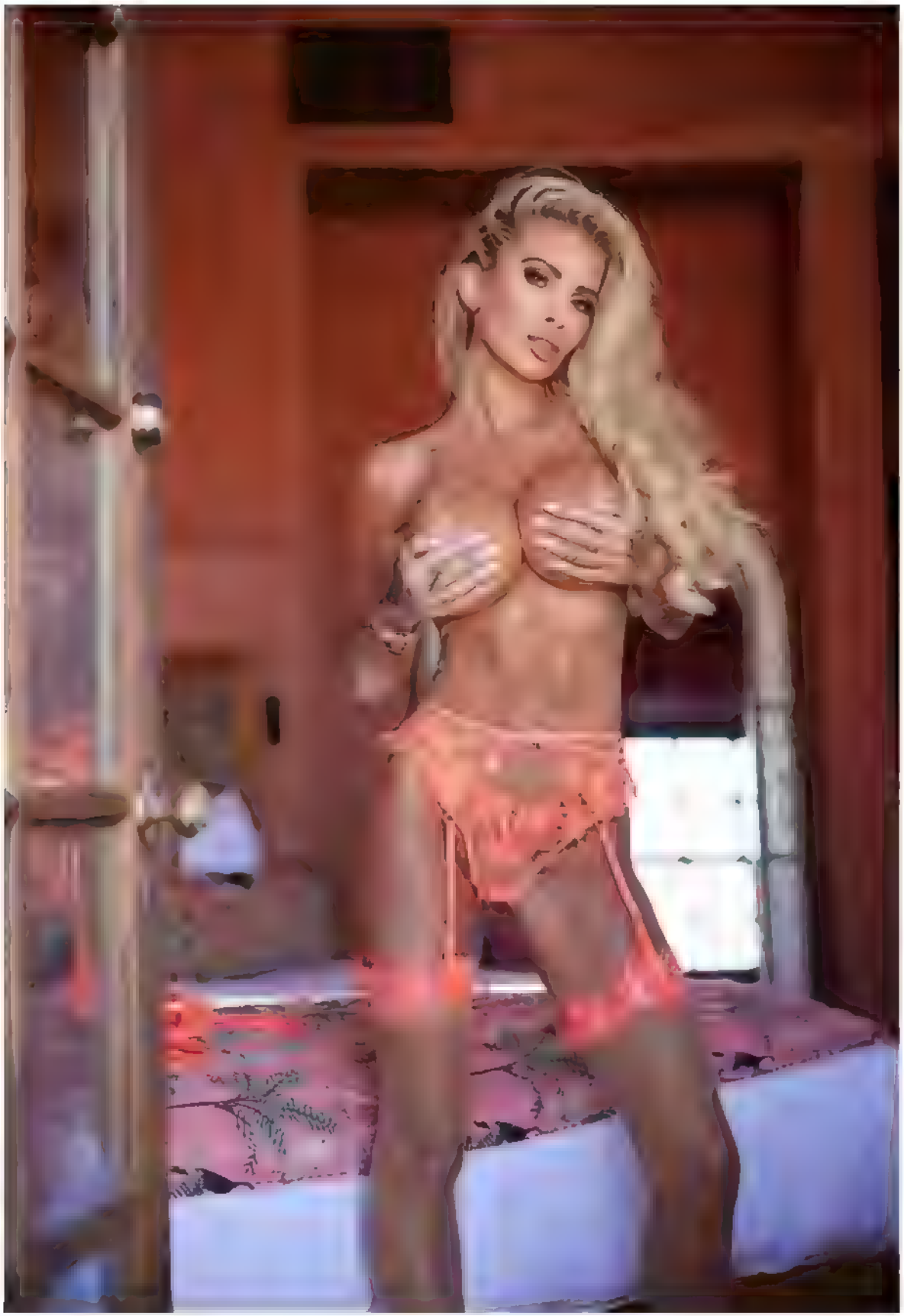
BARKLEY: We're a veteran team. We know what it takes to win. And we really want it. It's been a long time since I could go to a game and not have to worry about being spectacular every night. In Philadelphia people expected me to play defense. They expected me to score every basket. They expected me to get every rebound. That's impossible. Here it's so nice. Everybody on this team scratches everybody else's back. Like they say, life is good.

IN THE FIGHT

Lynnie Marie

Instagram **@misslynniemarie**

Photography by **Ramsey RLBphoto | @rlbphoto88**



Congratulations on your Playboy feature! How do you feel? I'm very excited to be on another cover and my first for this year

What is your best physical feature? Eyes

What's one thing people would be surprised to learn about you? That I love to go shooting at the gun range and have 6 guns.

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? I would hope to achieve my goal of owning several properties in the next 10 years.

What do you believe sets you apart from other models in the industry? I'm not afraid to be my true self

Who inspires you the most, either in modeling or in life in general? My mom

What message do you hope to send to women who see your feature? Be kind to yourself and prioritize your well-being

How do you define confidence and sensuality in your own terms? Actually knowing yourself and feeling sure of yourself and your abilities...not in an arrogant way, but in a realistic, secure way.

What has been the biggest lesson you've learned since entering the modeling industry? Always stay true to yourself and never let the opinions of others who don't understand you define your worth

Do you like taking vacations? Where is your favorite place you have been and where would you like to visit next? I love taking vacations and feel it's important to when possible. One of my favorite places to vacation is Puerto Vallarta. I would love to visit the Amalfi Coast and Greece.

Besides modeling, what keeps you busy? My Only Fans page and podcast

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? Probably a knife

What's next for you any goals or projects you're excited about? @coffeeandcleavage podcast goals for new guests this year and I'm currently working on a nude art book.

What advice would you give to aspiring models? It's nice when a photographer tells you that you actually look like your photos in person so take good care of your skin and body

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words for our readers and where can they find you? Thank you so much! You can find me @misslynniemarie on all social media platforms. I personally respond to all messages daily on my Only Fans

WILL WEED BE *PRO SPORTS'* NEXT MVP?

Many top-level athletes turn to cannabis for pain relief, despite the fact not all leagues permit its use. That could change soon

BY **KEVIN E.G. PERRY**

Sitting behind a desk covered in hemp rolling papers and glass jars full of bud, Al Harrington is explaining that he never thought he'd grow up to be a stoner. As a teenager in New Jersey, the six-foot-nine power forward had his heart set on an NBA career. Back then, before he was leading the line for teams including the Indiana Pacers, the Golden State Warriors and the New York Knicks, his grandmother would constantly remind him that chasing his basketball dream meant staying well away from illegal drugs.

"I remember my grandma kicking my aunts and uncles out of the house for even smelling like weed," says Harrington, now 40 years old and the founder and CEO of his own Los Angeles–based cannabis brand, Viola. "I was taught it was a gateway drug. I'd see guys strung out on the corner, and they'd tell you that cannabis is what started them down that path. I was smart enough to know I didn't want no part of that."

It was a surprise, then, when Harrington made it to the NBA and realized that many of his teammates—70 to 80 percent, by his estimation—were using cannabis in secret. "I saw professional athletes smoking weed and being productive," he says, raising his eyebrows. "We're talking about the best players on my team."

Cannabis remains on the NBA's list of banned substances, but perceptions surrounding the drug are changing across professional sports. At the end of 2019, the MLB announced that it would be removing cannabis from baseball's list of "drugs of abuse." The NHL also no longer classifies cannabis as a banned substance. This March, the NFL followed suit when, as part of a new collective-bargaining agreement, the league agreed to do away with suspensions for football players who test positive for cannabis. Harrington believes the NBA won't be far behind. "I think they'll wait to see how it affects the NFL, and I don't think it will affect the NFL at all," he says. "The NBA can't be the only league that doesn't change their rules. They'll look kinda crazy."

Ironically, Harrington's own cannabis awakening came thanks to the same person who'd first warned him away from it—his grandmother Viola, from whom his company takes its name. In 2010 Harrington signed with the Denver Nuggets, which meant he and his family were living in Colorado at a time when cannabis had been legalized for medicinal use. His grandmother was suffering from severe glaucoma, and after pharmaceutical treatments proved useless, Harrington read that she might have better results with the drug she still referred to as "reefer."

"She was always in pain, and she couldn't see," remembers Harrington. "Cannabis literally cleared her eyesight up. The first thing she did was read her Bible. For me that meant a lot, because my grandmother was so hard on any of her children using any kind of drugs. For her to be open enough to try it, and then to have that relief, and then the first thing she does is pick up her Bible? Those were signs being thrown my way."

But it wasn't until 2012, when Harrington went in for knee surgery and ended up with a staph infection, that he began to understand that "reefer" might benefit him as well. "I had to have four surgeries in a two-week span," he says. "I was on all kinds of pain meds, and obviously it wasn't agreeing with the way I felt. I'd be constipated, all kinds of shit. Somebody introduced me to CBD first. The next year, I started smoking. For me, it was about managing pain, but it was also because when I get high it allows me to deal with a lot of stuff mentally. Anything that goes wrong, the first thing I reach for is cannabis. I believe the plant can heal everything."

For many professional athletes, cannabis is more than just a lifestyle choice—it's a way of managing pain and inflammation that some feel is healthier than the truckload of pain meds they're usually prescribed. Eugene Monroe spent seven seasons in the NFL as an offensive tackle for the Jacksonville Jaguars and the Baltimore Ravens and became used to riding what pros jokingly refer to as "the T train"—a line of players waiting to drop their pants before each game so they can get the powerful painkiller Toradol injected into their backsides.

"We laughed and joked about it as players, but many of us were gonna get that injection because it essentially made you Superman," explains Monroe. "It masked all the pain." If that sounds like a good thing, Monroe points out the lack of feeling could be terrifying. "Back in college, I tore my labrum [the cartilage that lines the shoulder joint] in a game versus UConn at home in Virginia," he says. "I could tell that something was wrong with my shoulder. It really wasn't functioning like I needed it to, but there was no pain because I'd already had a Toradol shot for my knees. I just got wrapped up and went back out there."

Like Harrington, in his early days as a player Monroe avoided cannabis because of the stigma around it and the threat of punishment for using a banned substance. However, as his injuries mounted, so too did the number of prescription pills he had to take each day. Monroe says it got to the point where he was taking pills just to deal with the side-effects of other pills, so he started to look for alternative forms of treatment. "For

Monroe became the first active NFL player to challenge the league's ban on cannabis.

me, the major benefits of cannabis are as an anti-inflammatory and the relief from pain, headaches and other concussion symptoms that I still have years after suffering a bunch of them," he says. "I went from scheduling X amount of pills throughout each day to eliminating all of them. Now that I use cannabis, the only pills I take are vitamins and minerals. There's no more pharmaceuticals."

In March 2016, Monroe became the first active NFL player to challenge the league's ban on cannabis. He retired four months later at the age of 29, citing concerns over the amount of head trauma he'd sustained during his career. He'd like to see more research into the potential that cannabis may have to treat chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the neurodegenerative disease that has been identified in the brains of more than 100 deceased former NFL players. "We don't have any clinical data yet," he points out. "But as laws are changing, research is finally opening up. We're able to study much more dangerous drugs in a clinical environment, so it's about time we looked at the potential of cannabis as well."

Dr. Ware believes that cannabis legalization in Canada and in many American states should lead to an increase in the amount of research being done into the possible benefits of cannabis for top-level athletes—benefits that many former players already swear by. Matt Lombardi is a regular CBD user who was a professional hockey player in the New Jersey Devils and Pittsburgh Penguins minor league systems until his career ended early after he suffered a bad concussion. "I was getting the puck, and as I turned I got smacked in the face with an elbow," he remembers. "I had symptoms for six or eight months, so I missed half the season."

Lombardi is now such an evangelist for CBD that, along with former Chicago White Sox minor league pitcher Kevin Moran, he has co-founded a CBD wellness brand called beam. "Over the next five to 10 years, there's going to be so much more science and data coming out that it's really going to disrupt Big Pharma," Lombardi predicts. "I think it's really going to have a positive impact on how people think about their bodies and the endocannabinoid systems we all have."

For years the potential health benefits of cannabis for athletes have been downplayed, in part thanks to the same stigma that made Al Harrington believe he'd end up a junkie if he touched cannabis. But now professional leagues may finally be catching up to what many players have known for a long time: Cannabis seems to help.

Back in Los Angeles, Harrington says there's no reason cannabis use shouldn't be accepted across all professional sports. "If fans and team owners say they care about what's best for the players, then they have to allow it," he says. "If they've got to do research, pay for the research so you can scientifically prove it, but there's more than enough stories out here of how cannabis has helped a lot of people. It's just time."

Black Sex Workers Matter

Why you should care about what the adult industry is doing in this moment

BY ANITA LITTLE

Tonight, adult industry heavyweights Lotus Lain and Ana Foxxx will be taking over Playboy's Instagram Live platform to talk about race, an issue that's been at the forefront of everyone's mind for the past several weeks (assuming you're white, of course—a reminder that black people think about race their entire lives). Porn is a billion-dollar industry with countless consumers, and yet so much of what happens in the industry is under-examined due to our society's skittish attitude toward sex.

That means racism, along with sexism and a lot of other p'isms,' has been allowed to fester unchecked. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests sweeping the globe, many industries from tech to publishing are facing a well-deserved reckoning, and the adult space has been no different. First it was a trickle of stories from black performers about navigating discrimination and marginalization in the industry. Then that trickle turned into a flood as black performer after black performer started calling out the industry's shortcomings when it came to addressing anti-black racism. In advance of the panel we're hosting with Lain and Foxxx, we wanted to give you five reasons why you should be paying attention to what the porn industry does in this moment.

1. Racial hierarchies in porn help to perpetuate racial hierarchies in our daily lives through the politics of desirability.

Black features have long stood outside of society's accepted definition of beauty, and most of the narratives that we've constructed around what is attractive or desirable center whiteness. Psychological studies have proven that from a young age, we're all programmed by our environment to see lighter skin as more favorable and see darker skin as a"the other." The common practice of prominent white actresses in porn being paid significantly more than their usual rate to do an "interracial" scene with a black man or refusing to work with black men at all is a prime example of this. "Interracial" in the adult industry almost always refers to a white or white-adjacent female actress doing a scene with a black man, setting up a spectrum of value that places a premium on being a white woman and dehumanizes blackness.

When we say black lives matter, it doesn't just mean the black lives that society finds respectable, it means black lives period, and that includes black sex workers.

2. When porn is such an economic and cultural behemoth and gets a free pass to be racist, it encourages other industries to follow suit.

Part of the reason that racist tropes in adult content are overlooked is that the entire industry markets itself on the taboo. Whatever your kink is, there will likely be a couple thousand results that pop up when you type it into Pornhub's search bar. Into toes? Slapping? Felching? There's a scene for you. And though there's nothing wrong with having sexual kinks, there is something wrong when racism is your sexual kink. Not just porn producers but porn consumers have to bear responsibility for the glut of racially offensively porn. Consumers decide the market, and the porn market should be treated no different from other markets. If your favorite television show started spewing out racist jokes or scenes that played into stereotypes, you would likely stop watching that show. When porn consumers accept and thereby normalize racism in the industry, we give up our power to impact change in how capitalistic industries operate.

3. Racism in porn serves to keep black performers underpaid and siloed into limiting categories.

When a black performer does any type of scene, it can be guaranteed that the marketing copy will heavily emphasize their race, often in crass ways. When white women perform an anal scene, it gets to just be called an anal scene. But when a black woman does it, suddenly it's an all-caps p"big booty ebony whore begs for anal" or some other equally demeaning caption that capitalizes on harmful stereotypes about black women's sexuality. Whiteness gets to be the sexual default, while blackness is siloed into a fetishized subcategory. This dichotomy makes it easy for studios to tokenize or outright reject black performers due to their race or compensate them less than their white counterparts.

4. It also puts black female performers at a heightened risk for sexual harassment or exploitation.

As a direct result of centuries of racially supremacist conditioning, white women are inherently seen as delicate, innocent and worthier of protection. Black women have been socio-historically robbed of their femininity or womanhood, and are often expected to be p"stronger" or more tolerant of abuse. This can create a hostile professional environment for black actresses who often walk onto porn sets with less negotiating power and more vulnerability. A predatory producer might feel more comfortable crossing boundaries with a black actress that they would never try with a white actress. This isn't to say that white women don't encounter discrimination or sexual violence in the porn industry, but when they do, it's not because of their race.

5. We should fundamentally care about all sex workers because sex worker rights are human rights.

Sex workers are already devalued in society, and mistreatment of them is often characterized as an p"occupational hazard" that they should just accept. It's why anti-sex worker legislation like SESTA-FOSTA is able to pass with no one batting an eyelash even though it disproportionately puts sex workers of color, LGBT sex workers and trans sex workers in greater danger. When we say black lives matter, it doesn't just mean the black lives that society finds respectable, it means black lives period, and that includes black sex workers.

CYNTHIA NIXON *Pierces* THE VEIL ON A DEFUNCT AMERICAN DREAM

The award-winning actress and activist talks to Playboy about her latest project, *Stray Dolls*, and the dire straits of the U.S. working class—before the pandemic and now

BY ANITA LITTLE

When I call Cynthia Nixon at her home in New York, the state is in its sixth week of quarantine and Governor Andrew Cuomo has just met with President Trump to address the lack of funding for COVID-19 tests. Even though this is a press call for her upcoming indie project *Stray Dolls*, it's impossible not to launch into our respective stay-at-home lives.

"I'm homeschooling, like so many parents around the world," she tells me. "Homeschooling is now my middle name."

In addition to keeping up with her nine-year-old son (he's playing the role of Grandpa Joe in his classroom's harrowing Zoom rendition of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory), the Emmy- and Tony-winning actress has been spending a lot of time thinking about her fellow New Yorkers. The pandemic has hit New York the hardest of any state in the country, with the number of confirmed cases nearing 200,000. As a former gubernatorial candidate who mounted a hotly contested challenge to Cuomo in 2018, Nixon doesn't mince words when I ask how she would grade the governor's response to the outbreak.

"I mean, hindsight is always 20/20, but I wish both our governor and our mayor had had a shelter-in-place earlier. I wish they'd closed schools a little earlier. That would've helped a lot," she says.

"Having said that, I think that being on television, communicating with people at a time when there is so little coherent information and telling them the truth is very, very important," she adds, referring to the governor's daily coronavirus briefings that have become a much-needed counterweight to the bewildering statements coming from the White House.

> "One of the things art does is take someone who is behaving terribly and show how you might act similarly if your circumstances were that dire."

An outspoken progressive activist, Nixon has been using her platform, before quarantine and now, to draw attention to the most vulnerable people in her state—immigrants, the homeless, the poor and the incarcerated. (Correctional facilities can be hotbeds of contagion.)

Her career-long dedication to these issues explains her attraction to Stray Dolls, directed by Sonejuhi Sinha and released on VOD last month. Part Thelma and Louise–inspired queer love story, part immigration tale and part crime thriller, the film paints a stark portrait of the American dream's underbelly. In it, Nixon takes on a unique role: a sympathetic villain named Una who's a Polish emigre and owner of the seedy Poughkeepsie motel in which our characters toil and flail.

"She's got a lot of ambiguity to her. She is ruthless in a certain way, but I love her because we see she's not winning, right? She's winning compared to some of the people she preys upon. But she's in desperate straits herself," says Nixon.

And then there's the film's heroine, Riz, played by Geetanjali Thapa. Riz is another immigrant, from India in her case, whose murky past and formidable sense of self-preservation go against Hollywood's common characterization of South Asian women as docile and compliant. In the highly stratified pecking order of Una's motel empire, Una's race, legal status and time in America make her slightly better off than Riz, whom she hires as a cleaning woman. Una uses these small advantages to further exploit Riz and push her into a desperate life of crime. Riz's Sisyphean attempts to stay afloat only push fantasies of social mobility further out of reach as the plot takes one hard left after another. Viewers can ditch any hope for a "bootstraps" story.

"This is a survivor, a person of tremendous resources who will choose to survive, even if it means breaking the law," says Nixon of Riz. "Almost every person in the film behaves in a way that we would condemn, right? But I think one of the things art does is take someone who is behaving terribly and show how you might act similarly if your circumstances were that dire."

The feeling of working-class despair is palpable in Stray Dolls. It permeates all the characters, driving them to actions that are difficult to watch. In one of the film's opening scenes, a chain-smoking Una says to Riz, "You work hard, you make it here. You believe that?" One can't tell if it's meant to inspire or condescend.

The timing of the Stray Dolls release also stands as a stark reminder of how many people were already squeezed before the pandemic and are being shoved off the socioeconomic precipice now. More than 30 million Americans have filed for unemployment since mid-March, and the country is on track to experience its highest unemployment rate on record since the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics started collecting monthly data in 1948.

"This moment that we're in, it's not like anything I've ever seen or ever expect to see again. One of the things it does is lay bare all the cracks and fissures that were already there," says Nixon, who has joined the call to cancel rent and mortgage payments during the quarantine. "People who have tons of money are doing just fine, and they're even getting big handouts from the federal government to their companies, whether they need it or not. People who are living

paycheck to paycheck, if they don't work for a week, they can't pay their rent."

Many Americans received $1,200 coronavirus stimulus checks in April, an amount that will likely have to stretch impossibly far given how long some of us have been laid off, furloughed or working with reduced income. Although it's clear to economists and policymakers that a one-time check won't cut it for a months-long pandemic, Democrat-led efforts for additional payments are being stymied.

"What's the alternative? It's not something we can let just happen," Nixon says.

Nixon was an ardent supporter of former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, who was edged out of the race in April and whose platform centered on affordable health care and housing.

"That's a whole other conversation, but I think if people hadn't ganged up on him, he would have been the nominee and he would have defeated Trump. I really sincerely hope that Biden will be able to."

As we end our conversation, Nixon brings up the importance of art like Stray Dolls at a time such as this. It can be escapist, yes, but it can also act as a mirror held up to society, exposing the mendacities and hypocrisies that result in calamity for an entire class of people. It can even ask us to agitate for a fairer world.

"So many of us are just trapped at home," she says. "One of the things we do, other than cooking and cleaning and homeschooling, is turn on the TV. Stray Dolls is a really beautiful piece of art—a haunting story that stays with you."

"This moment that we're in, it's not like anything I've ever seen or ever expect to see again. One of the things it does is lay bare all the cracks and fissures that were already there." "

DREAMING BIG WITH Anastasia Henesey

Model **@anastasiamarinahenesey**

So good to have you join the Playboy family. Can you please tell us a bit about yourself? Well, I'm a fur mama to both my fur babies, Willa my Pitbull, and Texas my Pomeranian. They are my world and I wouldn't imag ne life without them. I also have a Bronco that I drive and I plan on buying a 1969 Chevy Camaro. I love vintage cars so having a collection is a must

What's something about you that people might be surprised to learn about? Well, I'm a super outgoing and genuine person I always help a friend or family member out, just as I was wired

3 things that you can't go a day without? It would have to be my Starbucks dr nk order "Strawberry Refresher with water only" til the day I die, my Bronco cause I drive it every day pretty much, and scrolling on TikTok.

What is the biggest misconception people have about you? People think I'm a very high-maintenance person or I need to have luxuries in life to be happy when really I'm very low maintenance. Don't get me wrong I do love the finer things in life and was like that in my younger years but as I get older I tend to change my ways with my day-to-day life and style

What's on your bucket list of things you want to accomplish or experience? I think about this question daily cause there is a lot I want to accomplish before I leave this earth. I th nk the main one would be starring in a movie or TV show, just to say hey that's me on the screen The next accomplishment I really want to have is to buy my dream home and renovate it the way I want and just be at peace on a farm

If you could choose one word to describe your journey as a model so far, what would it be, and why? Grateful because I was given the opportunity to be taken seriously in this industry and I will be forever grateful for this journey I was given

Can you share any exciting upcoming projects or collaborations you're involved in? As of right now nothing yet but I do have some great ideas within the next year but that's a secret for me to keep til then

What are some of your personal favorite recipes or meals that you enjoy cooking at home? Well sometimes when I cook, I like to change it up and freestyle it even though I would follow the recipe. My personal favorite would have to be bean salads I make or my Greek salads as wel.

What are some must-haves in your wardrobe right now? I need my buckle belts and my cowboy boots...I collect them and I feel like it makes me express myself when I wear them out and about

What is your favorite body part on you? on him? My favorite on mine would have to be my breast, they are my stress balls at heart But on a man would honestly have to be big arms, I don't know why they are my fav but it is what it is

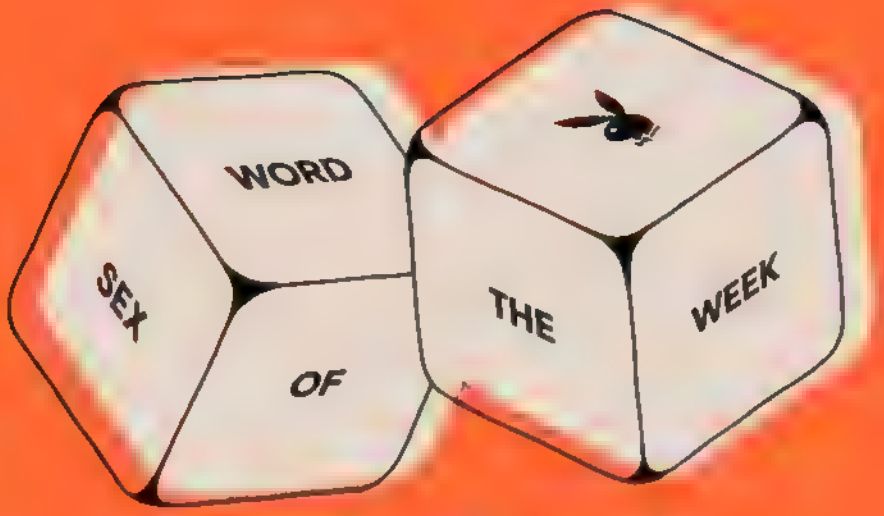
If you could be any animal, what would you be and why? I would have to say a tiger cause it's such a beautiful creature but still totally badass

That said, what advice would you give to all women regarding love and relationships? With my past experiences, I don't know if I should give advice as much as tell you what I have learned in my friendships and relationships. The main one I learned was to truly put yourself first before anyone when it comes to making yourself happy and feeling complete. I had to learn the hard way a couple of times but I'm slowly getting to a point of self-love and putting myself first

In what ways do you use your platform to inspire or influence others? I would have to say the way I inspire people to be the free spirit that they always wanted to be but were too scared to cause of how the world looks at things To really embrace the female body and feel sexy even if you're clothed, half-nude, or nude. Just know that everyone is beautiful in their own way

If you could change any one thing in the world, what would it be and why? I would want to change the violence in this world, there's been too much death in this world and it's becoming a scarier place to enjoy too

Thanks so much for your time. Where can our readers follow you on social to stay updated on what you're up to? Thank you so much again Playboy and looking forward to hearing from you again They can follow me on my Instagram @anastasiamarinahenesey or my Snapchat: @ stasii09.



IR

ANITA LITTLE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

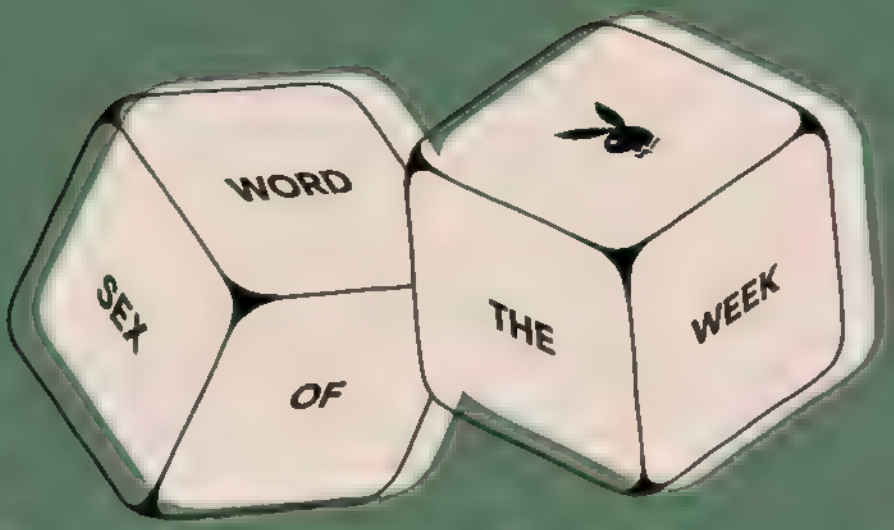
IR (*adj., abbreviation*) adult-industry shorthand for interracial porn scenes, commonly but not always between a white woman and a black man

The adult industry has held multiple town halls on the racist tropes displayed in many IR porn scenes between white and black performers.

The Black Lives Matter movement is sweeping multiple industries, from entertainment to publishing to tech, with accusations of racism forcing a much-needed reckoning. This is true of the adult business as well. In recent weeks the industry, which typically operates under the radar due to society's reticence around anything involving sex, has experienced heightened levels of scrutiny. Many of the allegations and criticisms relate to IR, or interracial, scenes, a marketing term that has become steeped in problematic connotations.

[redacted] minefield of stereotypes, marginalization and discrimination in order to see any type of payday, and in the wake of the George Floyd protests, [redacted] momentum. In the adult lexicon, the term interracial is much narrower than its standard definition and almost always refers to a white or white-adjacent female actress shooting a sex scene with a black male actor. [redacted] them to demand a payment much higher than their regular rate in order to perform with a black man. A prominent white actress can expect a tiny windfall for her "first IR" scene, with the phrase even becoming a subgenre on major porn sites. None of that bonus money trickles down to their black male counterparts, who often have to fight to be paid market rates for their work. The practice of paying premium rates to white participants in IR scenes while black actors receive less for the same work perpetuates damaging narratives about race and sex [redacted] in the porn industry and in America's sexual dialogue at large.

Sparked by the historic social shift that America is undergoing, major studios are finally having to address racism in the billion-dollar industry, and porn consumers are having to think harder about what they choose to consume and what it means to view porn ethically.



Fluid-bond

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

fluid-bond (*verb*) to exchange bodily fluids during sexual activity after making a mutual decision to stop using protective barriers

After much discussion and a visit to a testing clinic, Taylor and Emmy decided to move to the next stage of sexual intimacy by fluid-bonding.

This week's sex word emerged from the multifaceted world of polyamory but is now often used in a monogamous context as well. To put it simply, fluid-bonding is when sexual partners decide to stop using protective barriers (a condom, a dental dam, etc.) during sexual activity and exchange bodily fluids. It typically refers to ejaculate but can also include saliva, blood or other bodily secretions. Fluid-bonding takes on significance in the poly community, as an individual may be sleeping with multiple partners but decide to reserve fluid-bonding for a single partner, especially if their poly dynamic is hierarchical.

You might be thinking, I've had unprotected sex before; how is fluid-bonding any different? Fluid-bonding is usually seen as a thoughtful and intentional act, a meaningful display of trust and vulnerability. It's also heavily based on consent, where all partners involved have an open and honest dialogue about their sexual health and sexual histories. It's usually not bringing home a one-time hookup and hastily deciding to forgo barrier protection after rummaging around fruitlessly in your nightstand. Fluid-bonding can be a risky endeavor, as there's always the possibility of contracting or spreading sexual transmitted diseases. If there's penile-vaginal intercourse involved, there's also the chance of an unplanned pregnancy. You can mitigate these risks by being tested for STIs in advance of fluid-bonding and by finding an alternate mode of contraception such as the pill or an IUD. When it's an informed choice by all parties, fluid-bonding [redacted] way to build a more intimate connection and feel closer to your partner(s).

ALLYSHIP *FOR* BEGINNERS

Brand-new to the concept of being an ally? Read this how-to manual right now

BY **PLAYBOY**

As the global protests against police brutality continue to surge, so too does coverage about how to support the movement and those behind it. If you are asking what you can do to help, one individual-oriented answer is to become an ally. As an ally, you commit to being actively and productively anti-racist. You commit to amplifying Black voices. You own up to your privilege and the oppression rooted in that privilege, and then use that privilege to the advantage of the cause.

This guide is intended as a resource for white people who want to take action, though others may find it useful as well. It is a starting point; you must go beyond these suggestions and commit to long-term action.

Dos of Allyship

- Do listen.
- Do educate yourself.
- Do own your history.
- Do engage in conversations.
- Do show up.
- Do open your purse.
- Do use your voice. It's okay to feel uncomfortable; growth often is.

Don'ts of Allyship

- Don't ask your Black friends and peers what to do or how you can help. It is not their responsibility to be your private resource for an anti-racist education—you must do that work on your own.
- Don't assume all Black people think the same way, or that you know what they think. You don't get to decide who's right or wrong. Just listen.
- Don't take credit for work done by the Black community.
- Don't be paralyzed by "white guilt" or by fear that you'll mess up. Nobody is perfect, and your solidarity matters more than your anxiety.
- Don't prioritize your feelings or your story over those of Black people. Now is the time to listen and support, not to take the spotlight.
- Don't try to compare your personal struggles. Instead, let that empathy fuel your solidarity and supportive actions.

Social Media Best Practices

Posting on social media is a key action white people can take right now. Anxious about getting "political" on your channels? Worried about losing followers? That hesitation is a reflection of the discomfort you feel in beginning to do the uncomfortable work of being anti-racist—not just "not racist." Do the uncomfortable work that will help our society abandon the institutions that perpetuate inequality and allow violence against Black people.

As an ally, follow these considerations online:

- Do not share content that shows trauma or violence being inflicted upon Black folks; it could add to existing trauma. And be careful with what you Like on Twitter—that content may be displayed to your followers too.
- Start following Black accounts instead of simply reposting what your white friends are sharing, and take the time to look at what those accounts are saying and who the people behind them are.
- Use your platform to share helpful resources, or ask friends to match your recent donations.
- Use your platform to start conversations with other white people.
- Please, no more solid-black squares. Posting them is an empty gesture of performative activism: an action taken for the sheer purpose of increasing one's social capital, instead of truly supporting (or caring) about a cause. If you're doing it to be trendy, it is not activism; it's self-indulgent and hollow.
- Be a critical thinker. Just because you've seen something reposted a bunch of times by people you like doesn't mean you should too; it may not be in line with what you truly support. Think carefully and inform yourself before taking action.

If you're doing it to be trendy, it is not activism; it's self-indulgent and hollow.

Conversation Starters

Using social media to show your allyship is important, but are you practicing your preach offline? (Remember, not everyone uses social media.) Having conversations with family, friends, colleagues or people in your community is a necessity for allies. Talk about what you have seen or been thinking about, check each other, and encourage each other. But more important, when opening up conversations with your family and friends about racism or the BLM protests, if your talk begins with Black struggle, stop yourself. You must first address and acknowledge your privileged position as a white person. Here are some ways to kick off the conversation:

- Set clear and productive goals for the conversation. A goal can help ground conversations if they get confusing, heated or derailed. Refocus the discussion when needed, avoid microaggressions and stay calm—don't

get defensive.

▪ Ask others to elaborate on their opinions instead of shutting them down immediately. Be mindful of tone and language; conversations are pathways to understanding and to education.

▪ Recommend to your friends and family members a book, an article, a movie or TV show that deals directly with systemic racism or the Black experience. This will give you all something shared to talk about; use it as a springboard for a discussion that you can go back to.

• Share and discuss your news sources.

Look to various Instagram guides that have popped up recently:

• *Jen Winston (@jenerous) compiled a guide with nine suggestions on how to talk to your family about racism.*

• *Anna Edwards (@dwardslife) put together a two-part guide on "What to Say When People Deny the Reality of What's Happening Right Now." Uninformed remarks about racism, police brutality, all lives matter and more still abound; Edwards has created a handy guide on how best to engage with and respond to the (usually white) people making the comments.*

Self-Education

Educational resources and recommendations have surged over the past two weeks. Check them out, and as you incorporate anti-racist works into your regular reading routine, be sure to include historical volumes as well as newer content.

Take time to reflect on yourself and your own life and experiences. Our society and the structures within it have been shaped by white supremacy since this country was founded. Reflect on your personal beliefs and the structures that have benefited you as a non-Black person. Understanding how you fit into the systemic racism in this country is an important step in understanding the history of systemic racism in this country.

Act Locally

• Vote! Make sure you are registered. Do your ballot research for upcoming local elections, and show up on Election Day armed with the knowledge of which candidates support justice and equality. Local races directly impact city funding and resource allocations (such as defunding the police), as well as who runs police commissions and other important entities. The presidential election is this November, but there will be many other races on the ballot—start doing your research now.

• If you are able to physically show up at a protest, that's great. If you are not, that's okay too. There are ways to be helpful from home: You could call your local representatives, donate, sign petitions, call a friend or family member, sign up for vote-by-mail.

Support Black communities by buying from Black-owned businesses.

• A great way to ensure long-term support for Black communities is to buy from Black-owned businesses. Check out your local bookstores and restaurants. Start following and investing in Black-owned clothing companies and beauty brands; Ava Nirui (@avanope) has put together an ongoing list of Black fashion brands to support. Be mindful about where you spend your dollars.

• Check in on your Black friends, family, loved ones and close colleagues by letting them know you're available for support. This is not a time to reach out to your Black acquaintances or people you are not close with. Before texting or calling, read Jesse Sparks's great guide to "How to Check in With Your Black Friends Right Now." Make sure you have something to say beyond asking "How are you?" and that you have concrete plans for other supportive actions.

The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and Tony McDade are not isolated incidents; they are representative of a broader pattern of police violence against Black bodies, and are the result of institutions and white supremacy that enable it. As an ally, your support should not end when the news coverage fades out. Continue to hold yourself and your community accountable. Keep caring, keep talking, keep growing, keep learning, keep donating (if you're able), keep calling and keep showing up.

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